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Genuine Choices?: Nine Female Educators and Their Decision-Making

by

Mary Marjorie Curran Brooks

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

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Genuine Choices?: Nine Female Educators and Their Decision-Making

"It is through making choices that we become human and find our personal sense of meaning." (Hollis, 1993, p. 113)

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Genuine Choices?: Nine Female Educators and Their Decision-Making* submitted by Mary Brooks in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Adult and Higher Education.

Dr. Beth Young

Dr. Tara Fenwick

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Date: March 1, 2001

Dedication

To my daughters, Krista Gilliland and Janine Klaas, who give me love,

support, and encouragement.

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the life choices nine female educators faced and the decisions they made. During taped interviews, the women discussed the people and events that influenced their decision-making. I have compiled their comments under the themes of Higher Education and Professional Preparation, Teaching Careers, Personal Professionalism, Marriage, Children, Influence of Family of Origin, and Identity and Agency. Their voices are heard in this thesis through direct quotations. In addition, I have added my story to those of the other participants in this study. Through the give and take, teaching and learning that occurred during the interviews, the women and I discovered that many of the choices we faced and the decisions we wrestled with were similar in nature. We came to recognize that what we thought were private struggles with personal choices and decisions were part of more public, even political, conflicts that many women share.

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Many people were instrumental to my feelings of enjoyment and success during this chapter of my life.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Life is changing for many women. In addition to doing most of the childcare, eldercare, and homemaking tasks, women are entering the paid workforce in greater and greater numbers. They are also marrying later, having fewer children, and obtaining an increasing amount of higher education. How do specific women experience these changes when faced with choices related to education, work, and family life? What are the implications of their decisions for institutions of adult and higher education?

Background to the Study

My mother worked as a nurse's aid during World War II, then, at the end of the war, "quit work," raised five children, encouraged her husband's career growth, and took care of her home and family. Her story is not unusual for women who were her peers--who faced the decisions of marrying, childbearing, and working during the 1940s and 1950s. By the time I was faced with those choices, my life was already different from hers. To begin with, I had attended University and had begun a career--I was a teacher. Second, convenient, reliable birth control was available to married women so that, when I married, I could plan my family more easily than my mother did. Third, as a single woman, I had lived and worked away from home for a number of years and treasured my independence. These factors affected my choices and have made my life much different from my mother's.

Statistics Canada reveals that, while women are increasingly in the workforce for a greater number of hours, they continue to spend more time caring for children and seniors, and doing unpaid housework and volunteer work than do men (Statistics Canada, 1999a; Statistics Canada, 1999b). How do women make decisions regarding where to spend their time and energies? As part of my job as a research assistant, I interviewed part-time teachers, most of whom were women. I was intrigued by the reasons they gave for choosing to teach part-time. All of the women who said they wanted to work part-time were mothers with children ranging in age from eleven days to fourteen years. They all

expressed the need to continue their careers as teachers while, at the same time, enjoying their children and being part of their lives. Full-time teaching or full-time mothering at home were both unacceptable options for them. As I discussed my research findings with other members of the research team, one viewpoint expressed was that these women did not really have a choice as societal pressures forced them into being at home at least part-time. I question this.

Historically, women were seen as having fewer choices than men and were often prevented from making choices other than those of mother or single care-giver (Gerson, 1985). Societal constraints, which included a lack of educational opportunities and job choices, limited what they were able to do. However, this is changing. Women now outnumber men in institutions of higher education (Statistics Canada, 1999c), almost all occupations are open to women, and effective birth control allows women to choose if or when to have a family. This should allow at least some women to have more choices with regard to their personal and professional lives.

Researchers including Gilligan (1993), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986), and Noddings (1984) give evidence to support the theory that the moral development and decision-making processes usually associated with women may differ from those regarded as the "norm" in our society since these norms were developed by studying men. In addition, literature on women's career development indicates that many women anticipate that their careers will be nonlinear and fragmented (Grant 1989; Young, 1992). This research, combined with the statistics indicating that more women are obtaining higher education prompted me to wonder how selected women define choice and to learn more about whether today's professional women are still constrained by societal pressures that dictate they are mothers first and wage-earners second, if they are deciding to keep the best of both the public world of paid work and personal world of child rearing in order to balance the pleasures and responsibilities in their lives, or if they have other reasons for the choices they make. As an adult educator, I would like to determine if these findings have implications for educational institutions that work with adult learners.

Research Questions

I was interested in how women make choices and decisions regarding their career, education, and family lives and what factors influenced these decisions. In order to delimit the nature of my research, I focussed on one group of women--female educators--whose ages covered a 30-year time span. I hoped that the 30-year span of their ages would allow for an historical perspective on my questions. Specifically, my research question asked, How do the historical and current contexts of choice contribute to specific female educators' constructions of individual choice with regard to education, family, and career? How have these educators acted upon their choices?

Several additional questions helped define and give in-depth clarification to the research problem:

1. To what extent were the younger women in the study influenced by societal pressures to marry, have children and give priority to their families compared with the older women in the study?

2. What other factors, for example family, partner, and job or career opportunities, influenced these women's choices?

3. What was the salience of paid work at different times in each woman's life? Were there times when formal education became important? What were some other choices these women made at different times in their lives?

Organization of the Study

Design.

I used a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews as the main data gathering strategy because I was interested in understanding female educators' experiences with choice and decision-making and the meaning they made of their experiences (Reinharz, 1992; Seidman, 1991). Semi-structured interviews would encourage the participants to talk about the issues they felt were important while providing an organizational framework for me. After analysing some of the current literature and creating a list of questions that could be used for the interview guide, I

submitted my research proposal to the ethics committee for approval. Following their approval I sought out female educators who I thought might be interested in participating in my research and encouraged them to suggest other volunteers. Ten women responded positively to my call for volunteers so I sent them letters explaining my research (APPENDIX A) and consent forms outlining confidentiality assurances and asking for their formal consent to be part of the study (APPENDIX B). After reading the letter and consent form, one woman dropped out of the study due to lack of time. At the beginning of my interviews, I did a pilot study with a woman who matched the descriptors for my research. I used the pilot study as a test of the usability of the questions and of my technique as an interviewer (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The pilot study participant suggested a couple of changes to the questions while validating my ability to use an open-ended format. I used the revised interview questions (APPENDIX C) with the rest of my participants. After phoning the participants to ensure they understood the research and that they still wanted to participate, I arranged a one-hour interview at a place of their choice with the option of a follow-up interview, if necessary. I conducted a total of 13 interviews over a period of six months. These included one face-to-face interview with each woman plus a total of four follow-up interviews--two face-to-face, one by phone, and one by email and audio tape--in order for me to clarify information given in the first interviews.

Data analysis involved multiple readings of the interview transcripts and several relistenings to the interview tapes. Through these re-examinations of the interview data, I was able to discern several themes that occurred across the participants' responses. Because of the prompts I sometimes employed in order to encourage more in-depth responses (see APPENDIX C), these themes, at times, were related to the prompts I used. During the writing and rewriting of the drafts of the themes, I shared some of my findings with my advisor, other professors, friends, and colleagues in order to receive their feedback on the congruity of the themes and the descriptors I used. Their help was invaluable to me in sorting out my analysis of the participants' words and my categorization of the themes. The themes form the framework for organizing the

presentation of the data. I used information compiled from the literature to help interpret the participants' observations.

Participants.

I targeted female educators between the ages of 25 and 55 as participants for this research. Women in this age group were easily accessible to me and could give historical (within a 30-year time span) and current views of women's choices. I recruited volunteers from women with whom I was acquainted and by word of mouth. I was careful to select participants who varied with regard to the amount of education, paid work, and family choices. Because of the limited resources available for this research and my desire to have some commonalities among the women, I chose only heterosexual, "white," English-speaking women who were teachers, and excluded older or younger women, disabled women, and women with less than a university education. This limits the extent to which the findings may be applied to the lives of women in different economic, personal, or work situations but suggests areas in which further research could be conducted.

Threats to validity.

One threat to validity may be researcher bias. To counter this threat, I asked my advisor and a colleague to read my questions to check for bias and discussed this issue with the pilot study participant. A second threat to validity is the voluntary participation of the women and the fact that some know me personally. They may have wanted to present what they perceived as a favourable impression or to answer questions in a way they thought would please me. I addressed this problem as much as possible, by focussing questions on their perceptions of their choices and not the results of those choices, by remaining non-judgemental, and by ensuring confidentiality. Participant review of the summary analysis and of the transcripts further confirmed that my perceptions as researcher were compatible with participant meanings.

Researcher Beliefs

In this thesis, I am writing from a feminist perspective. This means several things to me and is reflected in how I carried out my research. As a feminist, I believe that the

experiences of all human beings regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, and degree of ableness are important to understanding the world and how it works. It is especially important, in my view, that the experiences and voices of women be heard and recognized as valid, something that, historically, has been absent (Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1993). When exploring the experiences of women, particularly, I believe it is necessary, and informative, to recognize and expose the interactions of power with gender, class, race, and so on (hooks, 1984; Lugones & Spelman, 1995). I also believe that social change is essential in order to recognize the potential and further the development of all people, especially women. In order for change to take place, women must understand why they are faced with particular choices, why they make specific decisions, and the implications these decisions have for their lives in the future.

As a researcher, I followed my feminist beliefs by beginning with my personal experiences when exploring topics for my study (Reinharz, 1992). The study was initiated by events in my life and the findings have implications for understanding my own choices and decision-making. However, I was careful to differentiate my experiences from those of the participants by writing my commentary in italics. I also quoted the women directly, whenever possible in order that the reader will be able to draw their own conclusions about how the women viewed their choices (Reinharz, 1992).

The work of Belenky et al. (1986), Gilligan (1993), and Noddings (1984) suggests that women value their connections with people close to them so are mindful of others' feelings and reactions when making decisions regarding their own lives. It was my belief that the participants in this study would, before they make choices, have carefully thought about how these choices affect important others. Because of the availability of effective birth control, and the increased opportunities for women to gain higher education and careers in almost all occupational settings, I also believed I would discover that today's professional women would be less likely than older professional women to be influenced to the same extent by societal pressures advising them to stay at home with their families. Career enjoyment, the need or desire for two incomes, concerns of a partner or parents, and the wish for adult interaction might be other factors which influence women's choices.

I was unsure about the salience of work and other factors at different times in women's lives. Levinson (1996) suggests that women's life stages and the transitions between them give rise to desires for life choices including education, marriage, children, and career at specific times in a woman's life. The timing of these choices often differ from those of the men Levinson studied (1978) because of women's involvement with childbearing and raising. Because the participants in this research vary in age, they will be able to inform Levinson's life stages research.

Feminist theorists have highlighted the disparity between the power and control women have over their lives and that which men have. They have pointed to patriarchal structures including the family, government, and organized religion as restricting women's choices and opportunities. As a result of my feminist beliefs, I speculated that some women, especially the older women in this study, would have had limited choices with regard to career and family options. It was my hope that, as inroads have been made into the domination by men of societal institutions, that younger women would feel less constrained in their choices.

Review of the Literature

Historically, women were thought to have few choices regarding their life work as their natures supposedly dictated mothering and other kinds of caregiving. Studies done by McRobbie (1978), Gaskell (1983), and Machung (1989) showed that girls expected motherhood to be their most natural occupation, and that paid work outside the home would take second place to their work at home. However, more recent research by McLaren (1996), indicates that young women may be rethinking their life goals and putting more emphasis on paid work while not completely negating their roles as mothers. They also appear to be anticipating a change in male life roles.

I have divided the literature review into the following sections which seem to be the most pertinent to the interview data: 1) Issues about work, 2) Women's ethical decision-making, 3) Life stages, 4) Women's choices, and 5) Teachers' careers and worklives.

Issues about work

Since the 1960s, women have been entering the paid work force in increasing numbers (Statistics Canada, 1999). However, many of these women have low-paying, low status jobs or work part-time (Schellenberg, 1997). Teachers are one example of this trend toward part-time work for women. In Alberta, as many as 25% of teachers in some school districts are part-timers and most of the part-time teachers--up to 90%--are women (Young, Gray, Alexander, & Ansara, 1998). Although neo-conservative government policies encourage women to stay at home with their children (Dacks, Green, & Trimble, 1995), "motherwork" (Hart, 1995) is still not recognized as "real" work (i.e., deserving of payment) and there is pressure on women who have children to also work for pay. For example, young, single mothers may be looked upon as "welfare moms" who need to upgrade their skills, enter the workforce, and stop relying on government handouts (Hart, 1995). Part-time paid workers who insist on the importance of both paid work and motherwork blur the borders between private and public, and reproductive and productive work. This may create confusion or uneasiness among other workers and administrators who are unable to "slot the part-timers into a specific 'place'" (Hart, 1995, p. 121). The model of the paid worker still presumes a masculine, non-caring individual who is able to work long hours and attend meetings in the evenings and on weekends (Acker, 1995; McLaren, 1996). These contradictions are not lost upon young women who must decide upon career, schooling, and mothering.

Research on women's career development suggests that many women do not have a definite career plan in mind when they finish high school as they are expecting to take time out of their careers to have children. They often plan for marriage and children but do not consider that they may end up alone and having to support themselves. Career development may take place after children are in school or when financial necessity provides motivation (Diamond, 1987; Grant, 1989). Marriage and children usually affect women's career opportunities more than her work affects her family life (Acker, 1992; Valdez & Gutek, 1987) since women still do most of the household chores and childcare after their paid working day (Baldez & Gutek, 1987; Young & Grieve, 1996). Female

educators may also define their career commitment in terms of being good classroom teachers instead of seeking to aspire to administrative positions (Acker, 1989). However family obligations can also have a positive affect on women's roles in the paid workforce and do not necessarily interfere with their recognition of themselves as workers (Biklen, 1986; Valdez & Gutek, 1987). The women in this study exemplify these contradictory experiences.

Women's ethical decision-making.

Carol Gilligan (1993) studied how women make decisions and found that women emphasize connectedness when making decisions concerning themselves and others. This sense of responsibility and care requires that, before they make decisions, women carefully look at the effects their decisions will have on their relationships with important others (Gilligan, 1993). This "ethic of caring" (Noddings, 1984) requires that women not only consider the well-being of others when faced with a choice or decision, but also that they respect their own needs and wants. The work of Belenky et al. (1986) reveals that, as women increase in self-confidence and self-respect, they desire to use their ethic of caring to improve their environment and the lives of others. Writers including Greeno and Maccoby (1993), Luria (1993), and Puka (1993), question the validity of these research findings and suggest that the ethic of care that women develop may instead be a way for women to combat sexist structures that limit their lives to caring occupations and motherhood, then denigrate them for doing so. Women may not be aware of this unconscious need to cultivate an ethic of care in order to protect their place in society.

Life stages.

When Levinson (1996) researched women's patterns of adult development, he observed age-linked "seasons" or stages in their lives. Through "intensive biographical interviewing and biographical reconstruction" (p. 7), Levinson examined how development and gender affected individual women's lives from the ages of 17 to 60. He found that women's lives during this period of time could be divided into two eras--early and middle adulthood--consisting of eight developmental periods. Each of these periods had their own characteristic tasks, important relationships, and structures, and framed the

choices women experienced and the decisions they made. Levinson maintained that a life structure evolves through a sequence of building and maintaining periods alternating with transitional periods where the structure that has been built is transformed. Structure-building periods usually last 5 to 7 years and are taken up with the tasks of forming and maintaining a life structure and enhancing life within that structure by making key choices and pursuing values and goals. After that period of time, the life structure that has been built comes into question and, during the traditionally five-year transitional period, women explore possibilities for change and become committed to choices that form the basis for a new life structure. Levinson states, "No life structure is permanent--periodic change is a part of the nature of our existence" (p. 25).

In James Hollis' (1993) discussion of life identities, he refers to different stages in a person's life as different identities that change every seven to ten years. He views the "first adulthood identity," which occurs sometime between age 12 and 40, as a time when choice is actually "a reflexive response to the early experiences and traumata of life" (p. 13). Then, after a person "confesses to powerlessness, to loss of control" (p. 25), she or he has the chance to become an individual, beyond parental and societal conditioning. It is Hollis' belief that this change, the "second adulthood identity," occurs during mid life (sometime between ages 40 and 60). The attachment of age to life stages has been questioned by researchers including Lowenthal (1975) and Campbell (1976) who claim that social stages of life, including gender, age, level of education, marital status, and number and age of children, are more helpful indicators than chronological age of differences in life course. The women in this study shed some light on these arguments.

Women's choices.

In a study conducted in the 1970s to discover how women make life choices, Kathleen Gerson (1985), concluded that change, resulting from unanticipated situations, was the dominant theme in women's lives. Socially structured opportunities and constraints interacted with women's responses to these circumstances and their unconscious motivations to define their available choices at a given time. Women were either pulled or pushed toward specific choices by circumstances outside themselves

including the presence or absence of a man in their lives and the availability or absence of job opportunities or career growth. These often unexpected influences on women's decision-making abilities resulted in women striving to make the best of situations they encountered. Women in Gerson's study seldom felt that they were empowered to make the choices that they would have made without these outside influences. With the increased educational and career opportunities available to women, this may no longer be the case (see, for example, Young, 1989).

Female teachers' careers and worklives.

Few studies address the issue of teaching as women's work even though the majority of teachers, especially in elementary school, are women (Acker, 1995). The notion of career is still often thought of in terms of male models which are focused on climbing career ladders into a range of hierarchically organized management positions. However, many women begin teaching with no well-developed career ambitions (Acker, 1995; Grant, 1989). They may be reluctant to make long-term plans for their career because they expect to get married and have children, necessitating a break in the continuity of their careers. Female teachers with young children may feel the "competing urgencies" (Young, 1992) of their dual commitment to paid work and family and strive to be successful in juggling the simultaneous demands put upon them (Gutek & Larwood, 1987). Spencer (1986) reveals that few teachers compartmentalize school and home. School activities including extra-curricular programs, marking, and planning cut into home and family time while personal problems affect teaching effectiveness. Acker (1992), in her study of two English primary schools, found that school influenced home life more than the reverse. More women than men also teach part-time, often in order to spend time with their young children (Young & Grieve, 1996). As well as affecting their salaries, pensions, and other benefits, taking time off to care for children or other family members may have a negative effect on being considered for administration roles.

Female teachers, especially those teaching elementary grades, are often thought of in terms of being "idealized" mothers (Acker, 1995, p. 121) who approach teaching from an "ethic of care" (Noddings, 1988) and a preference for connectedness (Belenky et al.,

1986; Gilligan, 1992). Such discussions fail to take into account different notions of mothering and of teaching (Acker, 1995). Because elementary school teachers spend long hours with one group of students, some writers see caring as an essential part of teaching young children. Like mothers, these teachers are expected to be altruistic and committed to "their" children. The idea that a teacher's work, like a mother's, is never done, reinforces this idea (Acker, 1995).

Young, in her 1989 study of four women educators, found that the women in her study fit the description of being "Late Bloomers." These women developed increased self-confidence and career aspirations later in life than usual--after age 35. At this time, too, they sought new challenges such as returning to university for graduate degrees. One reason for their late blooming may have been the competing urgencies they felt when their children were younger and they were beginning their careers.

There has been an increase in research focussing on teachers' personal experiences and on the diversity of these experiences (Acker, 1995). This research shows teachers as developing strategies and taking action in relation to the contexts of their lives and their interpretations of these circumstances (Acker, 1995). In light of these findings, researchers are challenging the definitions of career that do not reflect women's experiences. Biklen (1986), for example, found that women whose careers had been interrupted for various reasons spoke of always having been teachers. These teachers also believed that the quality of their teaching was the measure of the success of their career and did not want to become administrators (see also Acker, 1989). They saw their parental roles as being compatible with their roles as teachers. Young (1992) suggests a revision to the notion of career that includes a recognition of unpaid work.

> A career is a sequence of paid-work roles that are related to each other and to unpaid work (i.e., volunteer, family, formal education) roles by choice and chance so that knowledge and experience acquired from the various work roles is acknowledged and used from one paid-work role to the next. (p. 157)

The literature examined raised questions about the pressures women experience when making decisions and their strategies when faced with making choices. The

participants in this research provided insights into the answers to these questions.

Significance of the Research

The interview data and emerging themes provided in-depth descriptions which may allow the findings to be transferred to situations other than those of the participants. For example, the insights and conclusions may be applied and tested among other groups of women in different age groups, work situations, and economic circumstances. The research findings may support or question life stage research and the concept of female ethical decision-making. The information and analysis will contribute to an understanding of the notion of choice as female educators, over time, understand it. The study may also promote a closer look at the concepts of choice, work, family, education, and decision-making when applied to professional women. This may suggest changes to the ways school districts and teachers' associations address the concerns of female educators and the ways institutions of higher education deliver programs to women. The implications and recommendations included in this thesis may allow education institutions and groups to more successfully deliver programs to adult female students.

A Group Portrait

The nine women chosen for this study were teachers who were currently teaching or who had taught in the past. All of the women were white, middle-class, heterosexual, teachers, none of whom would be classified by others or themselves as having disabilities. They all had at least one university degree in the field of education, and teaching experience that ranged from 6 years to more than 20 years. I endeavoured to interview women of diverse ages between 25 and 55, and with different personal life experience. I hoped that women of different ages and at different stages of their lives would be able to show some of the diversity of women's experiences with choice and decision-making. The women who volunteered were between 28 and 52, with the majority being within two years of a decade marker. Three of the women, whom I knew slightly, were colleagues of mine at the university. The rest were recruited by women I knew who were interested in

my study and who discussed what I was doing with their friends. In order to help protect each participant's identity, I asked them to provide a pseudonym for themselves. Almost all the women, when given the opportunity, had an idea of the name or kind of name they wanted to be used. Some were adamant about what name they didn't want. We decided on Elaine, Lesley, Kathy, Eve, Marianne, Juliette, Jeanne, Roberta, and Carol.

Most of the women had grown up in cities in middle to upper-middle class families. Two had grown up in small communities and one woman lived in extreme poverty as a child. The majority of the women had at least one sibling and had grown up with two parents. Two women lived with only their fathers from age 18 to about age 20, one because of her mother's death, and one because of her parents' divorce. These two women were expected, by other family members, to take over at least some of their mothers' roles in the family. Three of the women talked about their parents' unhappy marriages as influencing their decisions about relationships. Four women, including the previous three, also recognized the primary influence of their mothers in their lives. The women's ongoing relations with their families varied, with one woman emphasizing the importance of considering both her birth and chosen families when making her decisions, and another woman not mentioning her family at all.

The women in this study had been teachers from between 6 and more than 20 years. They did not all begin their careers as teachers, however. Four of the women entered or intended to enter a field other than education when they finished grade 12. One woman wanted to become an engineer, one spent her first year at university in The Faculty of Business, one woman became a social worker, and a fourth was a freelance musician. At the time I interviewed them, all women were either teaching or going to school, or both, except for one, who was on a leave of absence from her school district following a maternity leave. Three women were teaching elementary school; one of these women was also going to university in a graduate program. Two women were administrators in schools where they were also required to teach while, at the same time they were in a graduate program part-time. Two women were full-time students, one in a Masters program, the other in a Doctoral program. And one woman was working as a

teacher/researcher with an environmental group and taking a technology diploma program at the university part-time. The participants had all taught elementary school, four had taught junior high school, one preferred teaching special education classes, one enjoyed teaching adults, one was teaching students and teachers at all grade levels as part of her job as an educational consultant, and three were or had been administrators.

The women's household situations also varied. Six of the women had been married only once for periods from 6 months to more than 20 years. One of these women was divorced. One of the women had been married twice and two had always been single. One of the women married at age 20 and remarried at age 28. One woman married at age 24. The other women married between the ages of 27 and 29. One woman had a child in her early twenties when she was single. One woman who never married had a child when she was 28. The rest of the women had their children between the ages of 29 and 35. Among them, the women had eleven children who, at the time of the interviews, ranged in age from 2 to 31 years. One of the women had just become a grandmother.

The three oldest and one of the youngest women identified their ideological beliefs as important to their decision-making processes. These included traditional Christian beliefs, feminist convictions, and the strong belief in the need to exert power and control over one's life.

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As the researcher, I was also a participant and part of the group. Throughout the interviews, I learned about and from the women and they learned about and from me. In this thesis I present their views of their choices and decision-making, but I also comment on their views and present my own. I need to show myself.

I am a white middle-class woman who fits into the oldest group of women. I grew up in the 50s in a working class family with two parents (until I was 17, when my father died) and four siblings. I was the second oldest. My mother was a stay-at-home mom who tried to extend my father's paycheck as far as possible every month. She believed strongly in marriage, discouraged me from having children, and encouraged me to be independent. My father was an authoritarian loner who believed you needed to earn

your way in the world. They both assumed that my siblings and I would go to university after high school. My parents had a huge influence on how I looked at what I saw as my choices when I was growing up although I didn't realize it at the time.

I have taught, mostly in elementary schools, for more than 25 years. I knew in grade 12 that I was going to be a teacher as I felt the public school system was unfair to many students (including me) and that I could do a far better job than many of my teachers had. I have never had any desire to be an administrator as I felt that a teacher's job was the most important one since she was the person in constant direct contact with the students.

Like the women in this study, I have made education a life-long commitment. In addition to a Bachelor of Education, I have a Bachelor of Arts and am completing a Master of Education. I hope to enrol in a Doctoral program in the near future.

Although I am currently single, I have been married and have two adult daughters and two grandchildren. I married when I was 22 and had my children by the time I was 26. I have lived mostly in northern Canadian communities with populations from 200 to 30 000.

I strongly support the feminist beliefs in equality of access to goods and services for all people and of unravelling and challenging dominant ideologies and discourse. These are rather recent additions to my belief system, however, and did not guide my early decision-making processes.

CHAPTER TWO: THEMES AND INTERPRETATION

Higher Education and Professional Preparation

"Oh, well, you go to university."

(Elaine, p. 7)

Attitudes toward formal education.

Education was, and remains, an important part of the lives of the women in this study. Although many of the women took education for granted when they were growing up, two of them had decided while they were quite young that getting an education beyond grade 12 would be a significant part of their lives. For Lesley, higher education leading to a professional career was a way out of poverty. She stated

> AN education was my way out. I don't remember making that decision but it's something I always knew--that to get OUT of this, I needed AN education. . . . And I was fairly determined to get out of the world I was in. (p. 17)

Kathy decided to apply herself to her school work when she was in high school and realized the difference education could make.

> You have those moments in life where you look around the world and you sort of interpret what's around you and I saw, the people who made decisions were always educated. The people who made change in the community or affected the community or implemented policies, they were all educated people. And I also thought, in my own personal life, I'd be better equipped to make choices, better choices, if I had more education. (p. 23)

Education, through being learners and teachers, has become an integral part of these women's lives.

Higher education.

All of the women had completed at least one degree (in education) and many had completed or were working on completing another degree. Four of the women had Masters degrees and three of those were undertaking Doctoral work. One woman was doing graduate work in a Masters program and another was completing a university computer diploma program. Many of the women had come from families in which one or both parents were professionals and higher education was expected and at least partly paid for. When they completed high school, they did not question the need for a university education even though they were not always sure what they wanted to take. The following are two representative examples of the women's remembered thoughts on higher education.

> When I was going to university, it was just the next thing to do. You know, you go to grade 12, and what's the next thing to do? Oh well, you go to university. After all, daddy's paying for it and I was living at home and it was the next thing to do, you know. It's not like, "Oh yeah, I've always wanted to go to university." (Elaine, p. 7)

> They [parents] probably expected me to go to university and supported that. You know, they had that plan in mind. (Roberta, p. 3)

However, two of the women, Kathy, from a family with two working professional parents and Lesley, from a working-class family, made conscious decisions to go to university in spite of their family's expectations. Kathy, because of her "attitude" and poor showing in school up to grade 10 was not expected to be university material.

> When I was making a career choice, people said things to me like, "Hairdresser. You should really go for the diploma route." (p. 2)

Lesley grew up in the 50s in a poor family. She was determined that she would escape from the abuse and poverty of her childhood.

> And when it came to grade 12, I was going to go on to university which was one of those unusual things in our family. I'm the only person to go

> on to university. . . . I always KNEW that my way out of this [situation] was an education. (pp. 1, 17)

Once the women decided to go to university, the choice became one of which Faculty to enter.

Choosing the Faculty of Education.

Most of the women in this study felt that choosing a career was a difficult decision and one that they had to make with little real help. Neither of the two women who mentioned school guidance counsellors found that they were able to offer assistance. Lesley was counselled out of the career she desired and Roberta found that her high school counsellors were not "terribly helpful" (Roberta, p. 3) in assisting her to discover what career path she wanted. Four of the women began their higher education with a definite interest in areas other than Education. Elaine followed the example of her father and his associates and went into the Faculty of Business.

> I'd sort of been raised in this climate where everybody around me was in some way or another involved in enterprise, in a business, real estate, sales, all these strands which seemed to me like a really good way of controlling my own destiny. (p.7)

She switched to Education one year later after teaching Sunday school during the summer and realizing that the interaction and creativity involved in working with other people was what she had been missing in her business classes. Jeanne graduated with a BA and worked as a social worker. After she met her partner, they both decided to go into education. This move to education was partly decided because of their mutual enjoyment of people and their desire to spend time together. Although Roberta took a music education degree, she planned to become a free-lance musician and use teaching as a back-up in the event that she was unable to earn enough to support herself as a musician. Lesley had dreamed of being an engineer. However, she went to university in the 60s when women were being counselled into traditional women's careers--nursing, home economics, and education. The school counsellor and her mother decided on education.

> I had gone through school younger than my peer group so I was 16 at the

> time. I had a very dominant mother and between my dominant mother and the school, I went into Education. I was counselled into Education. My mother MADE the choice as far as I know. And so it was either that or not go to university at all. (p. 2)

Carol, also, felt she had little choice but to go into education. For 40 years, one or another of her female relatives had taught in the small rural community where she lived. She said

> I went into education because that's what I was supposed to do in our family. . . . I guess I just probably was told I'd make a good one [teacher] all along and so I guess I thought that's what I should do. (pp. 3, 5)

The other women gave various reasons for entering the Faculty of Education. The following is a sample of their comments.

> I decided to go into teaching because I became heavily involved in drama. . . . So I decided to go into teaching so I could continue doing the fine arts aspect. . . . And for me, I thought it was important to do something positive for the community, try and help the community. . . . I thought, 'Well, I think it's important to help people and that's what I want to do.' So that's where the teaching background came from. (Kathy, p. 5)

> I needed to have a focus. I couldn't see myself go through university in Arts or Science, just because I needed to have something at the end of the road. . . . With Education, I knew that there was a job to be had at the end of the road, if I found one. . . . How did I choose education? Well, I knew that I didn't want to be a nurse. 'Cause I couldn't do that. (Marianne, p. 3/4)

Although these examples do not represent all of the reasons the women I interviewed gave for becoming teachers, they do illustrate a common feature of the reasons given--at the time when the women entered institutions of higher education, they were not engaged with teaching as a profession.

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For the most part, the women in this study grew up in families where education was valued and higher education was expected. For these women, going to university was part of their "normal biography," (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998, as quoted in Ball, Davies, David and Reay, 2000) that is, "linear, anticipated and predictable, unreflexive transitions, often gender and class specific, rooted in well-established life-worlds. They are often driven by an absence of decisions" (Ball et al., 2000). Going to university was a kind of non-decision and part of their 'inheritance codes' (Cohen, 2000, as quoted in Ball et al., 2000). In contrast, Lesley made going to university part of her "choice biography" (Du Bois-Reymond, as quoted in Ball et al., 2000). Du Bois-Reymond explains this by saying, "Choice biographies are by no means purely based on freedom and own choices . . . young people are forced to reflect on the available options and justify their decisions . . . it is tension between option/freedom and legitimation/coercion which marks choice biographies" (p. 65, as quoted in Ball et al., 2000).

This non-decision to go to university perhaps explains part of the reason why the women were not overly excited about going into Faculty of Education. With no clear career direction in mind, the women would be susceptible to traditional views of women's work. Three of the women went to university in the 60s when Education was one of the few acceptable and easily accessible careers for women. Teaching is still advocated for women who are interested in working with people, children in particular. It would have been a respectable and easily justifiable choice for the other six women who were looking for career options.

The role of the school in helping women make career decisions has perhaps changed since the introduction of CALM (career and life management) classes in high school. The women I interviewed did not mention these classes so it is possible the schools did not have them at the time they were in high school. Like the women in Grant's research (1989), the women received little effective career advice and may have drifted into teaching as a result of societal expectations about the nature of women's

work.

It is interesting to note that not one of the women had really chosen a career at the time they began university. It is possible that they didn't envision themselves as having to be their sole support in the future but were depending on their future husbands to support them. One of the women stated this, specifically, when she was talking about marriage. Societal expectations support the idea that women will be taken care of and do not need to have an independent financial plan for themselves. Most of the women in this study seemed to plan for being married and having children but did not plan for divorce, widowhood, or children leaving home. In fact, Roberta mentioned that she would soon face the "scary"decision of having "all this time" when her children both went to school (p. 14). These women did not consider that women spend one-third of their adult lives alone (Diamond 1987, p. 19) and that many old women live in poverty.

I, also, expected to go to university immediately after high school, but knew I wanted to be a teacher and work with children in the North. My miserable experiences in school and the realization, gained from working during the summer in Northern Saskatchewan, that Native Canadian children were being shortchanged when it came to their education, fuelled my desire to become a teacher as soon as possible and try to right this injustice. Therefore, I enrolled in the 2-year teacher education program and went to teach in Northern Saskatchewan when I was 20. I had no career plan other than to do my job well and enjoy it (see Grant, 1989). I also did not envision having to support myself in the future so, when we moved to follow my husband's choice of location, removed my pension to help with expenses.

<u>Teaching Careers</u>

> "[I] had a very good time and felt very content with what I was doing and felt that I was doing a very good job." (Lesley, p. 2)

The women I interviewed all said they enjoyed teaching and valued their reputations as good teachers. For most of the women, however, their careers had been

interrupted to at least some extent by the birth of children and family moves. Only Carol had remained teaching in the same school where she started until the year I interviewed her, although Jeanne had taught for over 20 years in the same district. Teaching, in some form, was part of most of the women's future plans, as well.

Career satisfaction.

Although the women did not start off with a passion for teaching, all of them talked about the enjoyment and satisfaction they experienced as teachers. Teaching was an important part of their lives. Juliette spoke for the majority of the women when she said

> That emotional connection is something I really do like in the classroom. I like knowing that I'm influencing them [children] in more than just curriculum and learning. (p. 21)

Many mentioned their love of teaching when they were talking about other specific aspects of their careers. The following are a few representative examples..

> I worked in a classroom with EMH students and loved it. . . . I loved what I was doing. (Carol, pp. 11, 15)
>
> [I] taught my niece to read. That was kind of like a huge moment. (Juliette, p. 6)
>
> I was happy teaching . . . I felt I was always growing and changing. (Jeanne, p. 20)

The women's career enjoyment and satisfaction was demonstrated not only in what they said, but in the way they returned to teaching after career interruptions and how they thought about their future. Their enjoyment and satisfaction with teaching influenced their other life choices.

Career continuity.

The women who participated in this study all considered themselves to be successful teachers for whom students and "good" teaching were important. Once they began teaching, all of them remained teachers. However, some of the women had experienced many career interruptions. For four of the five women with children,

childbirth necessitated leaving teaching for at least a short period of time. Both Eve, who began teaching in the 70s, and Elaine, who began teaching in the 80s, stayed home less than a year with their children before continuing with their careers. For Eve, this was a matter of not seeing the worth in being a stay-at-home mom. For Elaine, it was feelings of isolation and economic necessity that sent her back to the classroom. Having children further interrupted Elaine's career path by affecting her self esteem. She felt she had to start over each time she returned to teaching after her children were born.

> But, it has always been for me that, when I have a baby, I'm at a point where I have to completely abandon what I'm doing and try to put it back together later. And I've always found that having a baby just totally destroys my self-confidence as a teacher. And, I don't know why. But I always have felt that, when I go back, I have to put myself back together from the start. (p. 19)

Lesley, who had her children in 1978/79 when she was 29 and 30, stayed at home with her children until the youngest was in grade one. She explained

> I left teaching because I believe SO MUCH in those early years--that they're so important to kids. And I made that decision to stay home with my kids until they, at least, had started school--that I wasn't going to have kids and then have a daycare raise them--that I was going to be home and raise them and however they turned out then, that would be me or not me. (p. 3)

Roberta, a 39 year old woman with two children under six, had just made the decision to quit her part-time teaching job and stay at home with her daughters when I interviewed her. She and her husband decided that they "just want to make sure that our kids have a good base" (p. 11). Her decision was made easier when her school district officials were positive about the possibility for her to continue teaching with them whenever she decided to return.

Husbands influenced career continuity for two of the women. Both Elaine and Lesley moved with their husbands when they changed jobs. For Elaine, these relocations

and the necessity of finding new teaching positions led her to a change in the focus of her career--from teaching elementary school to teaching adults. She became an adult educator "without ever really trying--ever really structuring it in the normal way of going back to university and retraining yourself" (p. 15). Lesley's moves due to her husband's job relocations motivated her, in one case, to return to teaching after becoming discouraged and resigning. Another move brought her close to a university city so she could return to school in order to become an administrator. In contrast, Jeanne, whose husband moved to different locations to take promising jobs, did not move with him but remained in a position where she felt she could advance to an administrative position in the future.

Career futures.

When the women examined their future career options, most saw themselves as educators. They also recognized that they would probably need to increase their own education. Lesley was completing a graduate degree and planned on becoming an administrator in the district where she was currently teaching or in a district close to where she planned to live when her husband retired. However, other teaching options also occurred to her. "Maybe I'll come here and work with student teachers," she said. "That sounds great, too" (p. 21). This plan to teach teachers to teach appealed to two other participants as well. Both Juliette and Marianne thought that, in the future, they would like to resume their education and then teach in the Faculty of Education at a university. Carol, Roberta, and Kathy had specific areas they wanted to focus on in the future. Carol learned early in her career that working with EMH (educatable mentally handicapped) students was the area of teaching she enjoyed. She stated

> [I] realized teaching the regular classroom wasn't really what I had in mind. But working with the challenged kids I absolutely loved. (p. 11)

However, because the special education programs in her district were decentralized, Carol was bumped from her job by teachers with more seniority and was teaching in a grade 5 classroom. She realized that, in the future, if she wanted to return to a special education classroom she would probably have to continue her education to give herself a competitive edge. Her position as a single parent with student loans made that unlikely at the time of

the interview.

During her teaching career, Roberta had moved away from her initial designation as a music teacher and had begun teaching research and library skills. This led her to return to university part-time to get a diploma in teacher-librarianship. At the time when Roberta decided to resign her position to stay at home full-time with her children, the schools in her district were cutting back these positions so Roberta was not sure if she would continue with her diploma program in the future or not. However, working in the school library had aroused her interest in doing a Masters in Information Studies whether or not it was linked to teaching. Roberta hoped to put this plan into action in the future, depending on her family's financial situation.

Kathy had given up her dream of being a classroom teacher when she realized how much she enjoyed her job as a teacher/researcher. Her work included developing teaching modules that incorporated technology and she realized that she needed more technical knowledge. She returned to university to enter a diploma program in computers in order to increase her knowledge and her marketability. Completing this program and applying what she learned was her most immediate future career goal. She explained

> I'm taking more courses at the university and then I'm trying as much as I can to funnel that into work experience. . . . I just needed more technical knowledge. You know, how do you put a Web page up and how do you build a data base? How do you make it run? It gives me a chance to learn about the technologies that are being used in the school and use them at work. (p. 21)

Three of the women were somewhat undecided about their future careers although their own education was definitely part of their preparation for the future. Elaine, who was 39 and had almost completed an advanced degree, approached the future much as she had the past. She said

> I have no plans. I will either keep going [to university], or I will see an ad [for a teaching position] in the paper one day and apply and get it. You know, that's always been more or less my mode of making decisions--to

> continue what I'm doing until I happen to see something that looks promising or interesting in the way of employment. (p. 25)

She planned to apply for entry into a doctoral program. Eve, who had been a principal for many years and at age 52 was completing a Doctoral degree, stated that she was open to change in her career and her life.

> If I can survive economically, where I go is probably going to be the place that will give me the nicest adventure and a sense of continuous growth and a chance to see things that I've never seen before. I definitely do not want to return to where I was. (p. 5)

Jeanne, a 52 year-old teacher/administrator who was completing a Doctoral degree part-time, felt that her future career decision would be the most carefully thought out decision of her life. She expressed the concern that she had allowed others around her to lead her to various career opportunities, some of which she followed up even though she was not sure if she actually wanted the job. She felt that "in terms of career, it's been more enjoying and working and doing what I really like, but getting into things . . . leaping off a cliff without thinking--unconsciously" (p. 23). After more than 20 years as a teacher and administrator Jeanne was not sure what she was going to do in the future but had decided that she would seek professional assistance from a career counsellor to help her understand her options. She said

> There's a critical moment here of needing to do something and not letting it just happen to me. This is not going to be a luck or chance or someone suggesting, 'You should do this.' I want to have information. I want to know about the job possibilities and what else is out there. . . . And I thought . . . 'Okay, I've let the world sort of manoeuvre me into where I've been and now, you know, how much time do I have left? I still want to make a contribution to society. And how am I going to do that?' So, that's where I am. (pp. 18/19)

The women I interviewed felt very strongly about the importance of being good teachers and/or administrators and took personal pleasure in supporting and helping their

students. They also showed their unquestionable beliefs in the value of education. Six of the nine women were attending university when I interviewed them and four of these six were teaching at the same time. They were excellent role models for the importance and value of continued educational growth. Additional education was also in the future plans of the three other women. These teachers not only believed in the importance of being good educators, they lived their belief in the value of life-long learning.

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When I began analysing the data from this study, I was surprised (and dismayed) to see few direct references to the importance of career to these women. It took rereading the transcripts and listening to the tapes again for me to realize that most of the participants' conceptions of their careers were different from what I had expected because of the intertwining of their work and family (Biklen, 1986; Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Spencer, 1987; Young, 1992). Upon closer analysis I realized that the women constantly mentioned their teaching experiences and their careers as they talked about other things. Many of the women in this study interrupted their careers for various reasons, however, they didn't really stop thinking of themselves as teachers. Like the women in Biklen's (1986) study, they showed an "internal occupational consistency" (p. 506)--they always thought of themselves as teachers and planned to return to teaching. They were "career involved" (Osipow, 1996, p. 249). They did not see a conflict between being a mother and having a career. In fact, the two appeared to go together in many cases, motivated by their love of children. Although taking time off to have and care for children interrupted some women's careers, many of the women, when they returned to teaching, made a fresh start, sometimes taking their careers in different directions. In addition, moving with their husbands to a new work place did not seem bother the women who did so. Because they defined career commitment as "good classroom teaching rather than upward mobility through the system" (Acker, 1989a, p. 14), and because they thought about how they could better the teaching profession rather than how the profession could benefit them (Biklen, 1986), they used the opportunity to rethink their

careers or try out a new aspect of teaching. Their career aspirations did not depend on teaching in one place for an extended period of time so they were able to change and grow with new teaching situations. They chose to make the most of opportunities that were presented. This "situation adjustment" (Acker, 1989a, p. 14)--accepting a situation that is unlikely to be easily changed--seems to be a value many of the women in this study adopted as part of their socialized female identity, especially after they married and had children.

Many of the women's unquestioned assumptions about childcare and their husbands' careers may be what actually motivated the them to readily interrupt their careers. The women who stayed home with their children for a long period of time did not question in any serious way the need for them, as women, to do this while their husbands continued with their careers. Roberta's husband "offered" to be the one to continue working so Roberta felt she was the only one left to take care of the kids--not that she minded. However, she did not question the tradition her mother and mother-in-law handed down--that of the mother staying home to give the children and "good base"--and daycare or other arrangements were not suggested even though these would have been readily available in the city where she lived (Gaskell, 1992). Some women also assumed that it was more important for them to move with their husbands in order for him to keep his career going than it was for them to foster their own careers (Midgley & Hughes, 1983). One of the women even talked in detail about how she helped her husband find the right places to further his career at the expense of her own. These unexamined beliefs gave the women little opportunity to select a career path and work toward a specific goal. They may have adjusted well to unexpected circumstances and new possibilities because they felt they had no other choice (Acker, 1989a).

The women's financial resources, the historical context of the teaching profession, and the availability of maternity leave all provided extra incentives for many women to consider teaching as a flexible profession with regard to taking time off (Spencer, 1987). Neither Lesley, who had her children in the 1980s, nor Elaine, who had her children at the beginning of the 1990s, felt they would have difficulties getting a job

whenever they decided to return to work. Roberta, who had just decided to take time off to stay home with her children when I interviewed her, was assured that she would have at least a part-time job when she wanted to go back. These three women could also depend on their husbands' financial support. Partially paid maternity leave was also a taken-for-granted benefit for both Elaine and Roberta. However, Eve did not have maternity benefits, and was unmarried when she had her first child in the late 1960s and Carol was a single parent, so they did not look upon themselves as the flexible workers that the other women did. The influences of financial support and maternity leave demonstrate the way that social forces continually shaped the women's views of the teaching profession and of themselves as teachers and as women (Diamond, 1987; Fitzgerald, 1995).

The desire or need for more education in the future in order to continue with or expand upon their careers was an almost universal one. However, this was not necessarily looked upon as a prerequisite for career advancement, in the usual sense of the word--the majority of women were not thinking of becoming administrators (see Acker, 1989a, for one possible explanation). Instead, it appears that the women used more education as a way of enhancing their knowledge and of increasing their options. Their ideas for the future included an interesting, as well as rewarding, career. This tendency to see a career as a non-linear progression (Young, 1992) allowed the women to feel successful as long as they enjoyed what they were doing and felt that they were doing a good job (Grant, 1989; also cf. Fenwick, 2000). The women who were planning for specific future career goals were older women who did not have the same concerns about children as the younger women.

My career path has been much like those of the women who married and had children. Maternity leave was not an option when I had my daughters so I had to quit my job when I wanted to stay at home with them. However, financial constraints forced me back to work after my first daughter was born and a growing love of teaching prompted me to return a year after I adopted my second daughter. I had also learned, from my parents, to value the importance of work for my identity as a person. Staying at home for

an extended period of time was not an alternative I desired. As a "good" wife, I followed my husband when he moved to take a new position and expected that I would probably do so for the rest of my life. Like the women in the study, I have always thought of myself as a teacher, whether I was teaching or not. Although I did not have any career plans, as such, my career goal was to do a good job wherever and whatever I was teaching. It is just lately, now that I no longer feel responsible for my children's welfare and have returned to university, that I feel ready to plan for future career goals. This, also, follows the pattern of the women in my study (see also the "Late Bloomers" in Young's 1992 study).

Personal Professionalism

"This is me! I belong here!" (Lesley, p. 2)

Most of the women in this study closely connected their careers as teachers to their lives, beliefs, and growth as individuals. Teaching was a way of challenging themselves and of extending their care and concern for others to more than family members. For many, their personal enjoyment of children and young adults was one of the reasons they considered teaching as a career. It was also a reason for getting married and having children. Their views of themselves as educators who could help their students and colleagues reflected their beliefs in their worth as individuals.

For Elaine, teaching changed the way she looked at the world and was the start of her life as a learner. She said

> My education began when I became a teacher. I really, firmly believe that. . . . When I became a teacher and everything had to be thought about, then it began to influence everything I did. Then that's when I became a learner at all. . . . I no longer just took things for granted. (p. 9)

To Kathy, having the accusation, "Oh, you're not a real teacher!" (p. 11) aimed at her because she was not in a classroom caused her pain and confusion as she enjoyed her work teaching students and teachers and felt, "I work full-time and I feel like I'm doing a

good job" (p. 11). She felt that by attacking her role as a teacher, her friends were also attacking her personally. Roberta talked about the challenge of teaching and the enjoyment and opportunity for growth this brought to her life. While weighing the pros and cons of staying home with her daughters or returning to work part-time, she said

> But then, on the other hand there's personal reasons for wanting to go back to work--just needing a challenge and needing adult contact; needing to do something challenging for myself . . . (p. 12)

Juliette decided to try and include parents to a greater extent in her classroom. This project which she initiated with another teacher, added to her sense of pride and achievement as a person.

> We worked together on establishing a place for parents and sort of negotiating them with the curriculum and trying to get them involved in different roles in the classroom. And it was quite exciting and really neat! (p. 15)

Doing a good job as a teacher and being in a school where teaching was highly regarded were significant factors for the participants when deciding where to teach. Elaine reflected on her past jobs and future expectations when she said

> But my one determination this time in looking for a job is that I'm not going to compromise and take a position where I think that the teaching isn't excellent all around. And, in my last position, there was a lot of teaching that I thought was not very good. And now I don't want to teach in a place that doesn't value good teaching. I don't want to teach in a university or college setting where teaching isn't important. Where the opinions of the students don't matter. (p. 25)

Lesley felt strongly enough about what she saw as the increasingly political nature of schools that she resigned soon after she had returned to teaching after her children were in school.

> [I was] quite determined then that I was never going back to teaching. That that was enough. If this was what teaching was about, and to me, by

> then, what it was about was not about helping kids. It was about politics. It was about money. It was about position. But it wasn't about helping kids anymore. . . . So I left teaching. (p. 6)

This concern for "helping kids" was also reflected in Lesley's role of mother. Her concern with being a good mother and a good teacher overlapped in her strong belief in the need for helping and caring relationships. When she returned to teaching, Lesley decided to continue her education and become an administrator in order do something about the lack of care and concern in schools.

> Instead of seeing myself, then, as the classroom teacher fighting the system and getting nowhere, I saw myself as the administrator CHANGING the system. . . . So I went into administration. (p. 10)

As a vice-principal, she promoted cooperative teaching and peer coaching in order to encourage and assist teachers and facilitate cooperation among staff. She had a very definite idea of what this meant.

> I did a lot of mentoring with our new teachers on staff and I peer coach with the teachers and I really believe in those sorts of things, you know. And it's not just reducing isolationism in school, it's, it's fostering,. . . and I don't like the word collaboration at all . . . it's fostering the sense that we are all here. That it's not just go to your room and teach your class. That I shouldn't be surprised when you want to sit down and talk about some of the kids in your room. That shouldn't surprise me. I should KNOW those kids and I should know what's happening in your room because we've HAD a whole bunch of chats already or I've been around, I've seen the kids. . . . And it should work in a school where that happens between teachers. . . . And they know the kind of issues that go on and so someone can say, you know, "Well, yeah, I'll take all of them [the students] and we'll go for a story." And, "You just take these couple right now 'cause I know you've been trying really hard to help them with long division and you can't do it because the other 36 are really bored." So I have my own

> little kind of vision of where I think schools should be and a lot of it has come from . . . all this experience up through the past. (p. 22)

Lesley also thought that principals could make a difference, something she planned to do.

> I REALLY think those principals could have made it different. And didn't. . . . For whatever reason. But I really believe they could have made it different. And I think it's the leader of the school that does that--that makes it different. I don't think teachers . . . can knock down the walls. But I think they're MORE than ready to be a part of a bigger group. (p. 31)

Jeanne, also, had strong beliefs about the educational system and what that meant to her as a teacher, a vice-principal, and a feminist.

> I don't want to go into the principalship. And, in some sense, I kind of feel . . . as a feminist, I really believe we need more women principals. We need more women in education, in leadership roles. So I feel like I'm reneging on what I believe. And being cowardly in not looking at principalships. So I have to work that out. But, the principal's job today is so different compared to what it was when I REALLY wanted to be a principal. And that was working with teachers and working with kids. And [now] it's working with budget and politics. And I don't want to do that. (pp. 21/22)

For the women in this study, being a teacher was part of their personal identity. They extended their personal beliefs and values to include their professional identities as educators. As educators, they used their professional positions to create changes that were in accord with their moral and ethical beliefs as individuals.

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Most of the women in this study incorporated their personal beliefs and values into their professional lives as teachers. This overlapping of roles, beliefs, and values is an expected and perhaps essential part of adult life (McMahon, 1995; Overall, 1998).

Many of these women used the combination of their personal/professional voice to make schools a better place for students, colleagues, and parents. The respect they felt for their students was reflected in the ways they tried to change a system that no longer put students' needs first. Their self-respect was illustrated by the way they refused to continue quietly in a system they felt was unethical (cf. Fenwick, 2000). Noddings (1988) refers to this orientation toward the relationship between human beings and their situations as "relational ethics" (p. 218). Sometimes called the "ethics of caring" (p. 219), this ethics is "rooted in and dependent on natural caring" (p. 219), not a sense of duty. Applying this ethics to education suggests changing many aspects of schools including class size, hierarchical structures, and patterns of interaction, the very things Lesley and Jeanne discussed. For some of these women, the positive aspects of their multiple roles may have contributed to increased self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. Thus the security and happiness they found at home with their children and partner may have eased the stress or pressure they experienced in their roles of teachers, and the pride they took in their roles as financially independent professionals may have counterbalanced feelings of dependence and responsibility at home (Valdez and Gutek, 1987).

I wonder if, for some of the women in this study, speaking out about injustice in the schools where they taught was a way for them to exert some of the power and influence they felt they lacked in their personal lives. Women who felt obliged to subvert their needs and desires in order to support and care for family members, may have found it easier to strike out against this injustice in their workplace where there was no fear of losing loved ones or being a 'bad mother' when doing so.

Some of the women in this study mirror my own interweaving of personal and professional concerns. As I entered my 30s and 40s and realized the influence I could have as a parent and a teacher, I spent more time and energy trying to change schools into caring cooperative places. My classrooms became more student-centred, I worked on committees that advocated more teacher collaboration and voice in the running of schools, and I encouraged teachers and administrators to think of the needs of children

before the needs of bureaucracy. Of course these suggestions for a more "caring" (Noddings, 1988) school were not often accepted but I felt compelled as a person and a professional to try to change the way education was structured. Part of the reason for doing this was also to try and change the system that had made my life miserable as a student into one in which students who didn't fit into the mold of the "ideal student" would have a more successful time at school.

Marriage

"That mating thing, you always think will just resolve itself." (Juliette, p. 26)

Making the choice.

For the women in this study, marriage was an important and expected part of life. They grew up with the belief that they would marry and have a family. Carol, a 39-year-old single mother, stated

> If I was made to write down my wishes, it probably would have been, you know, meet Mr. Right and get married and have children and the house, the white picket fence, the cat, the dog. (p. 10)

Elaine, who was the same age as Carol but was married with two children, also mentioned that she had seen a husband in her future. She said

> I think it took me a while to get over the idea of a husband just being somebody who you're going to be wildly in love with and ride away and just live the perfect life, with a white picket fence and all that kind of stuff. (p. 11)

Juliette, who was single at age 31, had begun to think about how she would have to plan for her own future as she had assumed she would be living with a husband by now. She said

> That mating thing, you always think will just resolve itself. . . . You always think that there'll be another income and that yours will just be supplementary to whatever it is that you're doing. (pp. 29/26)

Not only was marriage expected, several of the women believed that living alone for too long could have deleterious effects. Living alone made one selfish. Elaine, who was 39 at the time of the interview, spoke for many of the women of all ages when she said

> I thought I'd come to a point where I didn't want to live alone any more. . . . I just felt that I was getting a little eccentric, that I was getting a little, where I did things just to please myself all day when I was alone at home or I could arrange my whole private life to suit no one by myself. I really felt I was at a point in my life when I needed to think about, you know, is this how you want to really live? No! I wanted to be WITH other people. . . . I'd had a lot of years where I'd had a good income and a lot of freedom to travel, and I'd done a lot of different things. I'd lived alone quite a while. So, you know, I felt I'd had that single life long enough. (pp. 11/12)

With marriage an expected part of life, the decision was when to get married. At age 27, after 7 years of living alone, Elaine decided that it was time for her to marry. Her friends had some influence on this decision.

> I think it had to do with how all my friends were getting married. It just seemed to be what the world . . ., you know, it was in our minds, I think. (p. 11)

Kathy surprised herself by marrying at age 27. She explained, "I think deep down I always wanted to get married but I didn't think it would happen so soon" (p. 14). Her husband assured her that he would never limit what she would be able to do, for example, teach in a foreign country, so she overcame any concerns she had. She gave this as one of the reasons she married him. Although she lived with her husband for a time before they married, Kathy believed that without a solid commitment, including marriage, she didn't feel right about planning the future. Her friends also had an influence. She explained

> When we were living together, people still didn't take our relationship seriously in some ways. It was sort of, "Oh, that's nice. You're living with somebody." And I found that our relationship didn't get the respect that I

> wanted or that I thought it deserved. So, by getting married, it was like, there's no questions. You have to respect this relationship. It's a legal document now. (p. 15)

Marianne waited until she was 29 to get married because she wanted to feel stable in her career and to have saved money. During the past decade in Alberta, government cutbacks and the restructuring of education have affected the jobs of many teachers. Declining budgets and fluctuating enrollments have limited some teachers' abilities to obtain and retain full-time jobs, especially in a specific school. Beginning teachers, especially, must often work part-time or be continually moved from school to school to provide the flexible workforce needed (Young, 1999, Young & Grieve, 1996). From the time she began teaching, Marianne had been moved around quite often and she wanted to feel more secure in her job.

> It was really important for us [she and her husband] to be secure in our careers, which, in my case, it's taken a long time to get secure considering all the, like, with the cutbacks you're always low man on the totem pole with getting cut. . . . I never knew where I was going to be so it was really important for me to feel stable in my career before I got married. And to have some money put away. That was also important for me because I didn't want to go into it with debt or with any other problems because I think marriage is a hard enough thing without all that other stuff. (p. 7)

For Lesley, her first marriage at age 20 wasn't so much a going to something as an escaping from an unhappy home life. She said

> And I'm sure the reason I did that [got married] was not so much a choice to be married, as a choice to not live at home. In that time period, in my household, with my mom, she had said something to the effect that when I finished university, then I would be able to support her. . . . And I hadn't thought of staying home and supporting her and she was seeing me as the spinster teacher doing this. And that's not where I thought my life was going at all! And so, I literally met someone, married them, moved. But

> then, in three weeks when the marriage was over, I moved into my own apartment. (p. 3)

When she married again at age 28, Lesley felt it was the right time to get married. She said

> I'd been partying quite a bit, too, and I think I was looking for that settling down--that it's time to settle down. (p. 3)

Bureaucratic policy in the 1970s was the deciding factor for Jeanne. Although Jeanne had lived with her partner for a number of years, she had no intention of getting married. She said

> I liked having the independence of living together. And that was a definite choice. . . . I didn't think that you needed to be married to be with someone. (p. 10)

At that time, however, common-law couples weren't given the rights they have now. When her partner became very ill and was hospitalized, she soon realized that not being married was a huge disadvantage.

> As a woman who is living with someone, the hospitals and doctors do not give you information. You are kind of just, you're not family, you don't count. So it was societal pressure and force that said, "Okay, you can have all these ideas that you want about marriage, but in practical terms, if you want to be considered a person, you have to get married. (p. 10)

Although marriage was important to the women I interviewed, it was not necessarily mentioned as being a life-changing decision. Many of the women, while appreciating the importance of making a life-long commitment, felt that this decision was an expected part of their lives and less life-altering than some of their other decisions. Kathy, who had been married less than two years, said, "Getting married created change . . . but I think it's actually underneath [in importance to] being educated" (p. 24). Roberta stated

> I didn't think that [getting married] was such a life-altering thing. It seemed a fairly natural progress. It didn't involve a big move or a big

change in lifestyle. It just fit with what we were doing. (p. 9)

Three of the women changed their names to their husband's when they married. They considered sharing a name with a husband and children to be part of becoming a family. The three women who kept their single name after they were married did so because it was an important part of their identity. Eve's explanation was typical.

> I changed my name for approximately a few months, and then I realized that I didn't want to be that person. I was still very concerned about maintaining who I was and so I changed my name back. (p. 4)

Carol and Juliette who were both single, and Eve, who had been divorced, all wished for male companionship in their futures, although both Eve and Juliette expressed an uncertainty about marriage. None of the women voiced a desire to be or remain single or to live in anything but a heterosexual, nuclear-type family group (with a male partner).

The influence of partners on choice.

Although Roberta and Kathy both downplayed the changes marriage made in their lives, for some women in this study, marriage almost immediately changed the way they approached decision-making. They became part of "a couple." Elaine explained

> I think I started arranging my life around what two people want instead of what one person wanted. (p. 2)

Although no woman stated that her partner was the greatest influence on how she made decisions, partners influenced the women's career plans, their places of residence, and their educational plans.

Jeanne's partner was part of the reason she decided to go into the Faculty of Education. After being a social worker for a few years, she got together with her future husband and began thinking about the kind of future they wanted. They decided together to go into Education. She explained

> Because we thought we could .. . I think it was having the same time off together, travelling, and . . . I think being at the university he found he really liked teaching also. So that is how I got into education. (p. 9)

Jeanne's partner was also her moral support and reality check. His continued support and

willingness to discuss her difficulties with decision-making helped her decide the direction for her career.

Elaine contended that, after the birth of their second daughter, following her husband while he got his career started was the second most important decision she had made. She said

> I had, by then, already established myself in teaching adult education and REALLY liked it. I had never thought of quitting a job for somebody else's career goals. But I did. And I wasn't sorry. (p. 2)

She wasn't sorry because, as a couple, they had decided that, "The first thing is that we are together" (p. 15) and, because her husband had a more difficult time finding jobs than she did, she gladly went where he was able to find work. Her varied teaching career kept her interested in education and was partly responsible for her change in focus from elementary education to adult education.

Lesley, also, moved with her partner in order for her family to spend more time together. As a result of this move, she reentered the teaching force after vowing that she would never teach again. Her experience teaching in this northern community was such a success that she determined that she would return to school in the future and become an administrator. Her husband influenced the implementation of this plan when he agreed to relocate closer to a university.

> My husband made the change then. And he got himself situated in ..... [a city] so he can work out of a shop and an office there instead of being in the oil patch, instead of being in the field all the time. So then we moved down to.....[a city close to a university]. I didn't like it [living in the North]. So, we ended up in ..... [a city close to a university]. (p. 9)

For the most part, the women who had been married for a number of years considered their partner's wishes and needs first before making decisions regarding changes in their careers, places of residence, and time spent away from teaching. Although most said getting married hadn't changed their lives to any great extent, this decision influenced all other decisions they made. The younger, newly married women

appeared to spend time and effort discussing the future with their husbands in order to ensure that their needs would be met in their marriages.

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Elaine's concern, echoed by Lesley and Marianne, that being single too long encouraged selfishness and could lead one to become "eccentric," is an interesting idea. I wonder where this unexamined idea came from and how widely held it is. One of the socializing beliefs in our society is that women, by their natures, are giving, caring, and unselfish, qualities considered essential for being "good mothers" (although Gilligan (1993) states that this is connected to gender rather than being gender-specific). Women who do not fit this mold are still considered "unfeminine" and do not fit societal role expectations. Did these women, and others in this study who talked about being "selfish," truly think that enjoying oneself without considering the needs or wants of others was a bad thing--something they had to guard against by acquiring a husband and then children? Or were they mirroring back the views of a patriarchal society that states the need for women to care for others at the expense of their own wants and needs? Whatever their reasons for believing in the need to curtail their own "selfishness," the women who expressed this belief were limiting the range of choices they felt were open to them. Because they wanted to be "good women," they gave up what they saw as inappropriate to this image--being single.

Socialization perhaps came into play again for the women who felt that getting married was part of their life plans and not really a life-altering decision. Again, the idea that heterosexual marriage, like higher education, was a nonchoice, at least when it was first experienced, may have prevented some women from exploring other alternatives for their lives. The two unmarried women who were cautious about getting married also saw living with a man as their desired future living arrangement. Since these two women were at either end of the age range of women in this study, this suggests that patriarchal imperatives regarding heterosexual marriage and family are still of overriding importance to women today.

Although they stated that getting married was not a life-changing decision, most of the women I interviewed had thought about when this would or should happen. Wanting to have enough money, have career stability, or enjoy oneself as a single person allowed the women to see when they married as an important decision. Three of the seven women who were or had been married continued to use their natal names. Although these three women differed in age--two were 52, one was 28--they gave the same reason for keeping their own name. They felt that their name was an important part of who they were. Although being married was expected, changing who they felt they were was not.

The two women who moved with their husbands when his job required this did not consider these moves setbacks to their careers. Each move brought a new challenge and an opportunity to enrich their teaching experiences (cf. Young, 1989, especially Chapters 3 and 4). Like the women in Spricer's study (1981), these women believed that moving initiated growth for them both as teachers and as adults. This may have been a way for these women to rationalize, after the fact, their decisions to put their husbands' careers before their own.

Unlike the women in this study, I married early, at age 22. I had expected that the women my age would also have married at a younger age but this was not the case, although Lesley did marry for three months at age 20 in order to move out of her mother's home. I was definitely influenced by my friends, most of whom were marrying at that age, and by the fear that I would be "an old maid," something none of the participants mentioned. I saw no benefits to staying single and had always envisioned myself as being married with children. I became what society and I considered to be a "good wife," putting my husband's needs and expectations before my own and following him as he set up his career path. My second marriage, 10 years after the first, followed much the same pattern although by then my career was more important to me and I often made career decisions without my husband's input. Although I earned enough to support myself, I relied heavily on the societal norm of being part of a family. I could not imagine living alone.

Children

"I never saw myself as not having kids." (Lesley, p. 15)

"We just thought marriage was a way of creating family, starting with two and working from there." (Elaine, pp. 14/15)

Most of the women in this study assumed they would have children. The following is a sample of their answers when asked why they had or would have children.

It's something that I've always thought that I would. (Juliette, p. 22)

I've always wanted kids. I don't necessarily know why that is or I don't even think I've really thought about it too much. (Kathy, p. 17)

I really had not thought of not having kids. (Lesley, p. 14)

[My husband] and I ALWAYS thought we would have children. (Elaine, p. 13)

When pressed further, these women mentioned their love of children, enjoying seeing life through the eyes of children, and feeling they would be good mothers. However, it seemed that motherhood had been part of their future identity even when they were very young. As little girls they had already begun to think of themselves as mothers.

Children and identity.

Having a child created the most significant change in how the women in this study looked at themselves in relationship to choices and making decisions in their lives. Whereas before they had children many of the women described their decisions as "selfish" (Marianne) and "following my heart" (Carol, p. 23), after they had children the women tried to make "responsible" (Carol, p. 2), "adult" (Roberta, p. 18) decisions that took into consideration the implications for their families. "Now, I have to follow my head," Carol stated (p. 24). The partying and fun of their youth gave way to adult responsibility after they decided to "settle down" and have children. This was not something they resented, but instead, led them to become, in their own minds and words, more moral, caring people. Elaine explained how having a child brought her husband and her closer together

and taught them cooperation. She said

> Then we were more a couple than ever before because now . . . we can't just both leave the house. We can't just both go in two directions. We always have to touch base and negotiate somehow. (p. 2)

Carol talked about how having her daughter made her look differently at her priorities and decide to make a serious career choice.

> I had to make decisions not because that's what I wanted to do, necessarily, but what was best for what was going to be happening next. For example, I could stay in ..... [a resort city] and do what I was doing and not be able to provide enough for my daughter or I could head back to that university and finish what I started. . . . I felt I had to do the responsible thing. . . . Do the smart, responsible thing. (pp. 4, 23)

Roberta explained how having children signalled becoming an adult for her. She said

> With a family and kids, you know, you're an adult now. You know, you're not the kid that's going off to school. (pp. 17/18)

Once these women became mothers, they embraced the societal norms that associate motherhood with morality and responsibility.

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McMahon (1995) states that "Children carry unique significance as validators not just of women's maternal identities but, by implication, of their characters as well" (p. 20). Most of the women in this study had begun to think of themselves as future mothers when they were still children. This "motherhood mandate" (Fitzgerald, 1995, p. 82) governed, to some extent, who they wanted to be and who they became. Their understanding of who they were was the only necessary motivation for having children. They associated motherhood with the ethics of care, with responsibility, with being an adult, and with being part of a family. These beliefs in the moral characteristics of mothers and the women's unexamined assumptions that they needed to become mothers to be responsible adults, greatly influenced other decisions in their lives.

For my participants, getting married often included the assumption that they

would have children. Children were part of the package. (Or, perhaps, husbands were part of the package.) It is part of the construction of heterosexuality so that to have children without a man or marriage is looked upon with suspicion (McMahon, 1995). In our society the "choice" of motherhood generally does not need explaining. It is the decision to remain childless that invites rationalization (McMahon, 1995). This lack of the need for an explanation as to why they wanted children was shown by the women who said that they had always known they were going to have children. Even the younger, newly married women, stated that they would "probably have kids" as motherhood is an expected part of being a woman in our society. They had not really thought of not having children. Being a mother was an unchanging part of their identity.

Most of the mothers in this study believed that having children enriched their moral development as adults. Responsibilities made them develop (Spricer, 1981). They became better people because they had children. They appeared to define morality in terms of connections based on care (Belenky et al., 1986), much like the college women in Gilligan's (1993) study.

> *The moral person is one who helps others; goodness is service, meeting one's obligations and responsibilities to others, if possible without sacrificing oneself . . . (Gilligan, 1993, p. 66).*

After they had children, most of these women abandoned their former images of themselves as selfish and after a "fun time" (Carol, p. 8) and viewed themselves as responsible adults who cared for others before thinking of themselves (Belenky, 1986; Gilligan, 1993). The older mothers in this study appeared to have left this perspective behind and were able to rethink their ideas of care and responsibility. Both Lesley and Eve were able to extend their beliefs in caring to include themselves. Therefore, they could approach the choices in their lives from a different perspective (Gilligan, 1993).

However, it is possible, as Pitt (1991), and Puka (1993) suggest, that some of the mothers in this study may have been reacting to societal pressures by using the ethics of care as a coping strategy. Women are often expected to nurture others, especially their children and partners, usually at the expense of their own needs and desires. Many of

the women did not question that they would stay home with their children and become more "responsible" and none seriously suggested that their husbands should do this. Questions of lessened pensions, set-backs to career growth, personal alienation and role confusion, growing dependence, and lack of choice were not discussed. The women demonstrated societal notions of responsible female adult identities by putting the needs of others first. Perhaps they had not seriously considered another mode of action.

I had never thought of not having children, either. To me, they were part of the life I was expecting after I married. But I found out I didn't like caring for babies, a fact I hid from almost everyone after people (women and men) reacted with disbelief and horror. Going back to work was necessary for my sanity and I soon realized that other care givers could care for my young children just as easily as I could. The force of societal expectations really hit me when I left my two daughters with their father for two years after suffering a breakdown. I became a kind of leper to the people I had known. Mothers did not leave their children for any reason, even if it was better for the children. Only selfish women did not want to give up everything to care for their children. The two years I spent without my children was hell for me. Although I still loved and "mothered" my children from a distance, to others I was a selfish disgrace. I had given up (many said, willingly) the biggest, most important part of my female self. I was not a real mother! This period in my life was the first time I began to seriously question societal expectations for women.

Children as a choice.

For most of the women in this study, getting married was "a way of creating family" (Elaine 13/14). Having a family involved starting with two-- husband and wife-- and adding children. This was usually taken for granted and not always thought about in any detail. Elaine asked, "Why get married if you're not going to have children?" (p. 32). Kathy, a newly married participant stated, "I've always wanted kids. I don't necessarily know why that is or I don't even think I've really thought about it too much" (p. 17). According to Lesley, "An only child [isn't] a family," (p. 16) and the other participants

agreed with her. All the married women with children had at least two, mostly because they did not think that a child should grow up without a sibling. The women reflected upon their relationships with their siblings, their love of children, their parents' experiences of support from their siblings, and the advice in child rearing books and articles to reinforce the idea that children would be happier growing up with at least one sibling for company.

Most mothers had definite reasons for having their children when they did. Elaine explained why she and her husband decided to start a family after three years of marriage when she was 30.

> I felt it was really important to have our children at a time when it fit in our lives, not economically, but sort of more psychologically, I suppose. I thought I was still young enough to really ENJOY a baby. . . . I just felt I needed the energy for a little baby that goes with being young. . . . I didn't want to wait until everything was perfect, like, you have the right house and the right income, and the right everything. I just wanted to have a child when I was the right age to enjoy that child. So, even though we knew our life wasn't really all that settled, we thought we would just have a baby. So we did. (p. 13)

Elaine admitted that her family also influenced her decision.

> My sisters REALLY thought it would be an excellent idea for them to be aunties. And my mother thought it would be an EXCELLENT thing for her to be a grandmother. And my father thought it wouldn't be such a bad thing for him to be a grandfather. (p. 14)

Because family was very important to both Elaine and her husband they decided that

> Well, we're going to have a baby anyway, we might as well have one while we're still living in .....[city] where the family's around and they can have the fun of that child, too. . . . So we had that baby that year so at least we could all have a year together, all having fun together. (p. 14)

One of Lesley's reasons for marrying her second husband was the knowledge that

he would be a good father for the children she planned to have.

> I think part of marrying my husband was the stability, the loyalty, the KNOWLEDGE he would be good father. . . . Part of that is all in kind of the package of why you choose the spouse that you have. (p. 15)

Her desire for more than one child was strong enough that, even when her doctor advised her against having more children after the premature birth of her first child, she chose to have another child the next year.

Roberta decided to have children after four years of marriage partly because her sister had children and also because both she and her husband enjoyed working with children. The timing of their second child was more difficult than the first although the decision to have her was again influenced by their friends and their families of origin.

> I guess we knew that we didn't want [our first child] to be an only child. We'd both grown up in families of three and we more or less get along with our siblings. We knew that we wanted her to have at least one sibling. Most of the friends that we know have more than one child and I guess we just wanted that sort of family, too. . . . It was sort of difficult to know when to time that second child. But, you know, you kind of take a chance and you jump in with both feet. And that's what we did. (p. 10)

Kathy hoped that the decisions her friends make will help her decide when is the best time to have a child.

> I kind of look to people my own age bracket that are maybe similar and sort of looking at what kinds of decisions did they make and what happened to them. (p. 16)

As with Elaine, Kathy stated that money will not be the deciding factor.

> I think for us, it's not so much money. I think it's sort of, are we mentally ready? There's certain sacrifices you have to make--your time isn't necessarily your own as much as it used to be. It becomes harder to find that personal time. . . . [And], just, freedom. . . . I think we're not quite ready to give that up quite yet. (p. 16)

Marianne, who had been married less than a year, planned to have children in the future but wasn't able to explain exactly why.

> I think just to enjoy seeing things again for the first time through a little kid's eyes is kind of fun. . . . I just think that would be a really neat experience and to kind of try to let this new little one kind of just be whatever they can be and do whatever they can do would be really neat, interesting, and challenging to see. I think. (p. 9)

As for when she thought she would have a child, Marianne said

> I guess a lot of it would be biological time, I suppose. . . . I'm almost 30, so probably it would be in the next five years but, other than that, it doesn't matter to me really when. I'm thinking something will hit me. A bolt of lightning. I honestly don't know. (pp. 10/16)

She and her husband have also discussed not having children, something only one other participant had done.

> If we decide we don't want to, which we've talked about it, you know, sort of in a, "Yeah, we'll probably have kids," but, if we didn't I don't know if either of us would be heart-broken either. I don't get that feeling. (p. 10)

An interesting comment, made by two of the women, concerned their decisions to have their second child. Both women felt that "the decision to have a second child was a harder decision than to have the first one" (Roberta, p. 10). When they discussed having a second child, these women and their husbands realized the commitment they were making and the implications the birth of another child would have for the mother's career. For both Roberta and Elaine, the timing of their second child became very important for these and other reasons. Family illness, job indecision, and moving all gave Elaine and her husband a sense of uncertainty in their lives. Having their second child when they wanted it, in spite of these other factors, gave them a sense of control over their lives.

> It seemed like good time to have a baby. And, also, it was a real feeling of control in our lives to just say, "You know what? What we wanted was a

baby. What we're going to do is have a baby." (p. 18)

Because Roberta and Elaine felt that they wanted more than one child and recognized the importance of their careers to their feelings of independence and security, these women made this decision carefully.

Juliette, a young woman in her early thirties, decided that having children was important enough to her that, should she not be married in the next five years, she will have children anyway. As she said

> It is kind of getting tick-tocky when you hit 30. . . . I would never just get married in order to fulfill that other part of me [wanting a family] . . . If I'm not married by, say 35, I think I would consider either having a foster child or a child of my own and being a single mom. (pp. 22, 29)

For the two young, recently married women in their late 20s, children were a part of the future; a topic to be revisited after they had time alone with their husbands, concentrated on their careers, and travelled.

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An assumption that all married women with children took as fact was the need to have more than one child in order to have a family. The need for a first child to have siblings was not questioned even when having such a child would interrupt a woman's career and perhaps even threaten her life. The strong influences of tradition and socialization seemed to difficult to overcome. However, only one woman in this study had more than two children. Two children provided siblings to support and entertain each other and also allowed the women to spend time with their careers and other activities (Osipow, 1996).

The women discussed the idea of their biological clock when talking about when to have their children. This may not have been so much a statement of when they would have children but one of whether *they were going to have them. Waiting too long would mean they would be faced with the possibility of being permanently childless (McMahon, 1995). Their age reminded them that being a mother was part of their desired identity.*

In Juliette's case, this part of herself was important enough that she had decided to have children whether she was married or not. This decision was probably made easier by the lessening stigma attached to single motherhood, especially if it is chosen by financially secure, older women.

Children as an influence on other decisions.

Having children affected the women's careers as educators in various ways. All of the participants who had children interrupted their careers to some extent when their children were born. Lesley and Roberta felt strongly enough about their importance to their children's early years that they decided to stay home for an extended period of time. For Lesley, this meant until her younger child turned 6 and went to school. Roberta agreed. She said

> It's very important for us to have one of us at home with our kids. . . . We just want to make sure that our kids have a good base. . . . You know, to have that stable home and to have one parent home as much as possible. I'd like to be the one that's raising my kids and not have someone else coming in with them for a good part of the day. (pp. 11/12)

Some of the women discussed staying home with the children with their husbands. Roberta's amused comment about her husband's answer was typical.

> He sort of offered to be the one that would work. . . . He wasn't all that interested in staying home full-time. So, being the only other one, it was kind of up to me. (pp. 12/13)

As Elaine's children grow up, she has applied for teaching jobs that will allow her more time with them. As many adult education classes are held in the evenings, Elaine explored teaching adults as a career option so that she would be able to spend time with her children during the day. Although Kathy didn't have children, she looked at her current job through the eyes of a future mother to see if it would be compatible with the flexible time she felt she would need.

Children's needs were also considered by the participants when planning their

futures. Carol, a single mom, put off returning to university because of the need to have financial security in order to support her daughter. Roberta began taking courses toward a Master of Information Studies but quit when she began having her children. Whether she returns or not to this new career path will partly depend on the money she and her husband are able to save for their children's higher education. Because Elaine's husband was able to support their family, Elaine was considering continuing her education and beginning a Doctoral degree. As she contemplated this decision, one influence was the effect it would have on her children. She explained

> I feel, with the student life I can be there at all the critical moments of the day when my children might need me. I can take them to school in the morning, and I can pick them up at the end of the day, and I can have time with them to make their lunch, and have time with them for this, and have time with them for that, that you just don't get if you're slavishly following that job pattern. (p. 28)

Lesley put the love of her children and her concern for their happiness ahead of her own wants and needs when she made the decision to continue with her marriage after a separation. This decision, which she identified as "THE most important decision in my life [which] has changed my whole life and will guide my whole life" (p. 23), was made with her children's futures in mind. She explained

> They're [my kids] the important part [of my life]. And I wasn't willing to have them have less of a parent than they had. They had one who was a great father. But, to do that, to give them that great father, I had to walk away [from the other situation]. (p. 23)

The majority of the participants expected to have children and welcomed them as part of what it meant to have a family. As they assumed they would either stay home with their children when they were young, or to be the one who arranged for alternate care, these women adjusted other parts of their lives to take this into account.

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The women in this study assumed that they were the ones who would be most responsible for their young children. Two of the women believed their care was essential for their children's present and future well-being (see Gaskell, 1992). Whether they took extended time off to stay home with their children or not, the way that women with children worked around the time they took off for child birth and child rearing reveals the extent to which they had expected these interruptions in their careers. They felt that having children was not incompatible with being a teacher or with being a student. They may even have chosen teaching based on their belief that they would be taking on the role and demands of a mother in the future. They felt that the experience of raising children enriched their lives both personally and professionally. Teaching and motherhood involved the same skills and brought many of the same rewards for these women. Thus, motherhood was not looked upon as involving self-sacrifice but was instead seen as expanding one's character and experiences. This may have been one of the reasons that many of the women did not argue about who would stay home with the children. If the women believed caring for children improved their moral character, they would have had little difficulty interrupting their careers for this purpose, especially if this did not cause financial difficulties. Because most of these women did not look upon their careers in a linear, goal-oriented way, they enjoyed the flexibility that being a mother and a teacher provided (cf. Acker, 1995; Biklen, 1986; Young, 1992). Rather than being limited by family obligations, many of the women felt that these responsibilities helped them expand their options (McKenna, 1997). As Spricer (1981) states, whether the women were staying home to raise their children, teaching, or doing both, their goals were always to do their jobs well and to feel competent (p. 26).

Most of the participants worried very little about finding a job after they took time off with their children. Roberta checked with her School District before she decided to resign but was assured that she would have no trouble getting a part-time job in the future. However, with cutbacks to education and fluctuating enrollments, this may not always be the case. Certainly, Marianne expressed concern about her job stability before

she decided to marry. Carol also thought about what changing school districts would mean to her contract and position of seniority and the effects that would have on her financial security as a single mother. Perhaps the ease with which many of these women slipped into and out of the job market had more to do with the security of having a working husband who was willing to support them and their children than with their beliefs that they should be the ones at home caring for their children .

Influence of Family of Origin

> "So I grew up with my gram and grandpa next door. And now my daughter is growing up with gramma and grandpa next door. I'm not going to mess with that! It works quite well." (Carol, p. 21)

Carol speaks for eight out of the nine women I interviewed when she talks about the importance of her family to how she looked at her choices and made decisions. These women made decisions regarding their education, choice of career, children, location of home, relationships, and social life partly as a result of family influence.

For many of the women, higher eduction was a parental expectation that they easily accommodated. For Carol, Kathy, and Marianne, even the choice of career was greatly influenced by their families. For example, Carol said, "I went into Education because that's what I was supposed to do in our family" (p. 3). Negative family expectations also had a positive effect. For example, Lesley, the only one in her family to decide to increase her education past high school, was determined to increase her education in order to escape from the poverty of her family life.

As the women in this research thought about their decisions to get married and have children, they recognized that their family influenced these decisions as well. Lesley's first marriage was a way of escaping the expectations of her family and Juliette and Eve both looked at their parents' less than happy marriages when they approached their own relationships. Both expressed a fear of being married. Eve stated, "So there was a fear based on a relationship that was not positive between my own mother and

father" (p. 2). Juliette said

> And so, for me it was that fear, 'yes but.' I knew what happened after you have the man who wasn't right for you. I have seen that scenario lived out my whole life, basically. So, in that sense, [I'm] much more cautious, I think than most people. (p. 27)

Although both women had recently been in long-term serious relationships in which their partners desired marriage, neither chose to make that decision.

Some of the women were influenced by family expectations when they decided to start their families and when they chose where to live. How the women were raised also affected how they raised their children. Elaine's family encouraged her to have children and looked forward to spending time with them. Her parents and siblings were frequent visitors while Elaine lived in a neighbouring province and later, when her husband had a chance to relocate, they left well-paying, satisfying jobs to return to the city where her family lived. Elaine recalled

> My sisters, for years, took every vacation they ever got to come and visit my children. And my father and mother would come three times a year to visit so when we did move back to ..... [city], part of it was to reduce the wear and tear on the whole of them. . . . So, I guess you could say that, really, all those decisions are really STRONGLY guided by family ties. (p. 16)

For Lesley, it was her husband's natal family that influenced where she and her family would live. When they first had children, Lesley and her husband moved to the city where her husband's parents lived in order for their children to know their grandparents. Later, they moved from a northern, hard to reach community, in order to be closer to his family.

Carol relied on the moral support of her family to help her get back on her feet when she became a single mother. Her strong family ties and the desire for her daughter to have a close extended family have kept her living and teaching in the small community in which she grew up even though she had been advised that her health may be suffering because of it. The year I interviewed her, she had been forced, because of cutbacks and

the reorganization of schools, to move to a school, in which her family had no history. For Carol, this was one of the things that made her entire year a discouraging experience.

> And the other thing is the history that I had and my family had at that school, too. Like, this is the first year in forty some years that there hasn't been a ..... [person from her family] teaching there, you know. That's just, that's history. And when I went to school there, from grade one to nine, my mom was teaching there. I had my mom for grade three. And then MY daughter went to ..... [the same school]. So, you know, every day I woke up, I went off to school with my mom. And every day my daughter would wake up, she went off to school with her mom. . . . I wasn't ready to leave. (p. 15)

Although the doctor advised her, for health reasons, to move from the rural home she occupied, Carol's strong ties with her family prevented this.

> We've inherited my grandparents' home which is lovely. There's nowhere else I'd rather be. . . . And I think it's not a healthy environment. I think there may be mould and, it's pretty old. And not worth renovating. So she [the doctor] said that I needed to move. And I said, "Oh, it's not going to happen.". . My grandparents' home is there and my parents' is on the next acreage, so I grew up with my gram and grandpa next door. And now my daughter is growing up with gramma and grandpa next door. I'm not going to mess with that! It works quite well. . . . I have no intentions of moving off. (p. 21/22)

Mothers were the family members who had the greatest influence on the women I interviewed, especially in the ways they looked at their choices and decisions. Elaine looked upon her natal family as matriarchal and, therefore, had no difficulty adopting her husband's last name when they married. She felt that her father's name was "just a name" (p. 32). Carol's mother and other female relatives had all been teachers so she felt compelled to follow the same career path. Lesley's "dominant" (p. 2) mother not only decided what career path Lesley would take, her expectations were one reason for

Lesley's brief first marriage, and she greatly influenced the kind of mother Lesley became. When Lesley had children, she became concerned that her mother's parenting methods would become her own. One of her most conscious decisions, then, was not to be like her mother. She enlisted her mother-in-law to help her carry out this decision. Eve's mother influenced her first career choice--to join the Armed Forces--and her thoughts about herself as she grows older. A recent visit to her mother revealed a side of Eve she didn't want to see. She said

> And, it was interesting being with her at Christmas. She's 79 and I look, at times when her strong mindedness and independence and her fear of growing old and losing power and control became a mirror of how I saw myself. And it frightened me a little. It frightened me because she's also alone. And when I think about the fears that I've handled, the fear that I haven't handled is that social interaction. As much as I want to be strong and independent and capable and in control and whatever, I do want a relationship. (p. 9)

Juliette recognized her mother as the person who had prevented her from losing herself in relationships that were, perhaps, not the best. She said

> I think . . . she instilled in me a caution not to become completely dependent on a man, yeah, and probably, . . . not lose yourself in all of that, you know, different values and perspectives and what's important. . . . And she's always been quite supportive of my being single, I think, and quite happy that I'm choosing to do this. (p. 23)

The women who participated in this study recognized the importance of their family of origin, especially their mothers, to the decisions they made. Only Marianne made little mention of her family when discussing her choices.

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In this research family was very influential on women's decision-making. Although the importance of nuclear family is assumed to be lessening, many of the

women in this study desired close contact with their families and relied upon their support. Many also accepted without question that they way they had been brought up was the right way and continued these traditions with their own children. It is possible that the importance of their own mothers to many of the women was one reason that they looked upon their roles as mothers as being so important (see Chodorow, 1978).

There seemed to be no single characteristic that determined the amount of influence a woman's family had. Carol, who stayed in a small, rural community in order to be with her family, had rural roots and was a single parent, both of which could help explain her decision. However, Elaine, who moved with her husband and children to be close to her family, had grown up in a city and had the support of a husband. The main characteristics these women had in common was their age (39) and their roles as mothers and teachers.

The two youngest, recently married women mentioned their families of origin the least. It is possible that one reason for this is that natal families are becoming less influential. Perhaps, also, because they had no children, they were not concerned about creating an intergenerational link at this time.

I was surprised at the continuing influence of many of my participants' families of origin. I finally realized that this amazement was due to the fact that I have little or no contact with my siblings now that my parents are deceased. Even before Mom died, we were not a family that held reunions or got together on special occasions (or any other time, for that matter). While this may have disadvantages, it also has allowed all of us to develop individual traditions and resist some of the pull of family socialization.

Identity and Agency

"[It] seemed to me like a really good way of controlling your own destiny."

(Elaine, p. 7)

For many of the participants in this study, their feelings and beliefs about who they were had a determining effect on what they did regardless of what society, their friends, or

their family said. They listened to what they called their "inner voice" (Kathy, p. 2) or "intuition" (Lesley, p. 19) to help them maintain a sense of personal power in the face of familial and societal norms and beliefs that, in their estimation, pushed them in a specific direction.

Personal voice.

Many of the women I interviewed relied upon their personal judgments of what was right for them when making decisions. Although these women may have discussed their choices and decisions with friends and family, their final decisions were often the result of personal convictions and insight. For example, Marianne chose to listen to people who supported her own inclinations when laughingly explained

> I kind of get validation from the people around me rather than changing my mind because . . . so I'll veer more towards the people who are with me than against me. (p. 14)

Elaine, Lesley, and Kathy described this inner voice or feeling in the following ways. "I felt much more that I was doing something that was meant for me," Elaine said (p. 8) when she described the feelings that led her to change from Business to Education. Lesley explained her drive for higher education, something unique in her family, by saying, "Some things are not a choice or a decision. . . . It's intuition more than anything" (p. 19). And Kathy found the will to reject her family's suggestion that she become a hairdresser by listening to her "inner voice" that said, "No. Don't do it. Don't listen" (pp. 2/3).

Marianne, Juliette, and Elaine spent time thinking about and weighing various alternatives before relying upon their personal convictions. Marianne admitted

> I can't make a decision very quickly. I always take a long time to weigh things out. [I] probably just [do] a lot of thinking on my own, kind of thinking about weighing both sides. I do a lot of that back and forth, pros and cons. (p. 14)

Juliette thought for a long time about what she needed in order to overcome her depressing teaching situation. She said

> I just thought, 'Okay, I need something to raise myself out of it and step

> outside of all of this so I don't get bogged down and become bitter and hate my job. (p. 20)

Her reflection led her to enter a Masters program. Elaine spent her after-school hours making lists of reasons why she should or should not marry her partner. In the end, none of these reasons mattered. She explained

> I just felt so at home with him that it didn't matter that I had all these reasons. (p. 6)

A sense of personal power and independence.

Most of the participants in this study wanted to feel independent and to have some sense of personal power. They needed to feel they had some control over the decisions they made and would make in their lives. They satisfied these needs in different ways. Kathy, Jeanne, and Eve kept their natal names in order to protect their identities and give them a sense of independence. Teaching was a source of financial and/or intellectual independence for many of the women. Lesley was anxious to return to the stimulating environment of the classroom after she had been at home for six years with her children. Roberta was concerned about how she would handle the lack of financial and mental stimulation when she decided to resign in order to spend more time at home. Carol depended on the financial stability that her full-time job provided in order to support her daughter and herself. And Eve, when explaining one reason why she could not be a stay-at-home mom said

> Financial security gives independence. Professional involvement provides independence. (pp. 2, 6)

Marianne believed that, without financial independence and job security, marriage would be too difficult. She said

> I didn't want to go into it [marriage] with debt or with any other problems because I think marriage is a hard enough thing without all that other stuff. (p. 7)

Consequently, she and her partner waited for six years to get married.

A number of the women believed they had or could have a considerable amount of

power in their personal lives and in their schools. Elaine decided that having a child even when other parts of her life were not necessarily conducive to this decision, gave her a feeling of personal control. Lesley stayed home with her children until they were in school full-time because she believed she had the power to influence the direction of their lives. "And however they [children] turned out then," she said, "that would be me or not me" (p. 3). She credited her decision to put her children's needs first as being one of the main reasons they were enjoyable adults. Lesley also believed she would have the power, as an administrator, to change the oppressive nature of schools. This belief led her to enter Graduate Studies and apply for prinicpalships. She stated

> Instead of seeing myself, then, as the classroom teacher fighting the system and getting nowhere, I saw myself as the administrator CHANGING the system. (p. 10)

Questions of power and control have been central to Eve's life. These considerations have prompted her to question the need to be married and have given her the desire to have a sense of direction in her life. When discussing the decision not to marry the father of her first child, Eve said

> I wanted my independence. I wanted to have two things which I have constantly questioned in life--power and control. I don't know why. But I wanted to have that sense of who I was and where I was going. (p. 2)

As an older woman taking on new challenges in education, politics, and other personal endeavours, she had been cautioned that she was getting too old to succeed in these ventures and that she soon would not be able to take advantage of new opportunities. She replied, "I'll create my own window of opportunity" (p. 5) and has not let others' expectations hinder her belief in herself.

Challenging oneself.

Most of the women I interviewed looked for ways to add challenges to their lives. For some of them, teaching itself was the challenge. Marianne spoke for most of the participants when she said

> I thought that it [teaching] would be something that I would enjoy the

challenge of. (p. 4)

But some of these teachers also continually looked for new challenges for themselves from other sources as well. Kathy reset her goals every six months in order to keep herself interested and engaged in her work. Lesley continued her education with a Doctoral degree in order to confront her fears that she might not be as smart as she thought. Jeanne enjoyed the challenge of additional graduate work and the resulting administrative position she obtained. For Eve, taking risks in order to challenge herself were a major part of her life. She said

> I cannot let that fear stop me from moving ahead. Not taking risk is the biggest fear of all. . . . The risk is worth it because you can live in the comfort zone and never step outside, and life will go on from day to day. But at the end of the time, will you really have lived? (p. 8)

This desire for a challenge and a way to discover who she was led Eve to enter politics, compete in a triathlon at age 40, continue her education, and take part in many community, national, and international events that allowed her to put her beliefs in equality and justice into action. Her picture of her future contained this same element of challenge.

> Where I go is probably going to be the place that will give me the nicest adventure and a sense of continuous growth and a chance to see things that I've never seen before. I definitely do not want to return to where I was. (pp. 5/6)

Societal expectations and identity.

The women in this study reacted in different ways to societal expectations regarding the decisions they made. Although some women seldom questioned norms that prescribed traditional roles for women--wife, mother, caregiver--other women rebelled against these traditions or questioned their need or desire to follow some cultural assumptions but not others. One example of the ambivalence women felt toward societal traditions was expressed in their ideas about marriage.

Elaine expressed what almost all the women grew up thinking about marriage when she said

> A husband is just somebody who you're going to be wildly in love with and ride away and just live the perfect life with a white picket fence and all that kind of stuff. (Elaine, p. 11)

Some of the women felt that being married was not a life-changing event because it was an expected part of how they believed their life would be. Remaining single and thinking about oneself was considered "eccentric" (Elaine, p. 11) or "selfish" (Marianne, p. 18) behaviour. However, not all of the participants decided they wanted to live out this vision. Jeanne felt very strongly that marriage was nonessential and planned never to marry her partner. Kathy had decided to teach overseas and accomplish other goals before she got married as she believed that being married would prevent her from being able to act on her wishes. Her boyfriend's assurance that he would in no way put limits on her goals convinced her that she could marry before she had completed all of her objectives. Eve and Juliette both looked at their parents' marriages and decided to be cautious about committing themselves to a formal marriage arrangement. And Juliette refused to get married solely in order to have the children she wanted.

Many Canadian women still plan to change their last names to those of their husband when they marry. The women I interviewed had contradictory views of this tradition regardless of their ages or their ideas about marriage itself. Lesley, Elaine, Roberta, and Marianne all changed their names to help give coherence to their family. Interestingly, the school, a traditionally conservative societal institution, provided a strong reason for doing this, even for Marianne, who was not certain that she would have children in the future. Teachers, secretaries, and other school personnel often assume that children will have the same last name as their parents. Children who do not may have to answer potentially embarrassing questions as to why they don't. These teachers recognized this risk and decided to save their children from the experience.

> I would just like to have the same name to, I don't know, it makes it easier in my eyes. When the kids go to school and stuff and there's a different name signed--this is from being a teacher--just, "Whoa! What's going on here? Who is this? Or whose mom is that?" That's why I changed it. If

there was any children to come, that why I did. (Marianne, pp. 8/9)

However, Eve, Jeanne, and Kathy decided that their names were part of their identity--part of who they were as people--and kept their natal names. Kathy believed that the accolades she had received as a single woman symbolized her growing independence and self-confidence. She was not willing to have that compromised by becoming someone else even in name only. Jeanne and Eve believed that their natal names were an important part of their identities and signalled their independence as women.

Resisting societal expectations was an important part of Kathy's decision to continue her education and of Eve's goals to succeed in whatever she was doing. Kathy remembered a turning point for her in high school when she became aware of the importance of education and the lack of successful female role models.

> I remember sort of looking around--you know you have those moments in life where you look around the world and you sort of interpret what's around you--and I saw the people who made decisions were always educated. The people who made change in the community or affected the community or implemented policies, they were all educated people. And I also thought, in my own personal life, I'd be better equipped to make choices--better choices--if I had more education. . . . The other interesting thing was just seeing a lot of older men in suits all the time in figures of power and, you know, like, aren't there any women? (p. 23)

Eve has had her goals questioned by friends and colleagues who felt she was the wrong gender or too old to achieve success in our society where men hold most positions of power and where older women are almost invisible. Resistance to these assumptions has become part of her identity. She stated emphatically

> So that issue of moving beyond what is the assumptions about what is acceptable for age groups or gender or whatever, I thought was really important. (p. 5)

Although many of the decisions the women in this study made appeared to be the result of their socialization as women, they also relied upon their own beliefs of who there

were, whether or not these agreed with societal expectations. While they faced many of the same choices, their decisions often differed partly as a result of their self-image.

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Many of the women in this study talked about not only being influenced by family, friends, and socialization, but also listening to an "inner voice." In Spricer's (1981) words, "The kinds of responsibilities an individual [took] on [were] a function of the person's self-definition or identity" (p. 125). This appears to be Belenky's position of "constructed knowledge"--an effort to reclaim the self by attempting to integrate intuitive, personal knowledge with knowledge received from others (Belenky, 1986, p. 134). For these knowers, Belenky states, "the moral response is a caring response" (p. 149). This response takes into account the effects any single choice will have on other people and signals a commitment to relationships. As the women looked at their choices and made decisions, they considered their own needs and how these would affect their families, their work, and themselves. Their sense of who they were included consideration for these others. In their work, many of these teachers decided to use the power they had to improve schools for students and teachers. Belenky says

> *Constructivist women aspire to work that contributes to the empowerment and improvement in the quality of life of others. They speak of integrating feeling and care into their work. (p. 152)*

This orientation toward responsibility showed a self-concept based upon a sense of connection and relation to, and care for, others (Gilligan, 1993; Lyons, 1983; Noddings, 1984). Whether this preference was a result of an actual ethical stance by the participants or, as Pitt (1991) and Puka (1993) suggest, the result of societal pressure, the women in this study were adamant that their personal sense of identity included a desire to think of the effect of their decisions on others as well as on themselves.

Challenges, for most of these women, were closely related to their work--they changed jobs, taught different grades, increased their education, and enjoyed the

demands of continually changing classrooms of students. Only Eve talked about outside interests and activities that challenged her physically. Perhaps the mostly unrecognized form of their challenges accounts for the comment, made by three of the women, that their lives were uninteresting. Although they had travelled, had children, married, held teaching jobs in different schools and at different grade levels, and lived in different communities, these women may have felt that their choices did not have the same social value or worth as those usually considered challenging (Gilligan, 1993).

The women who rationalized changing their names when they married because of the desire to protect their children from uncomfortable school situations indicated that, as teachers, they had experienced the bureaucratic side of this situation. They seemed to be implying that they thought it was impossible to effect structural change and that they were not willing to try. Although I understand the difficulty, having experienced it myself, I wonder if this reason was a cover for seemingly less rational (to them) arguments. Elaine mentioned not being attached to her natal name. Lesley said she hadn't realized she didn't have to change hers. Marianne said she could always change it back later if she wanted to. These comments, made in passing, seem to indicate a 'not thinking through' of the decision at the time it was made and perhaps a later rationalization. It is possible that changing one's name, like getting married and having children was part of what these women expected as part of being a woman in our society. Perhaps, also, they were not willing to hurt their husbands by not taking his name as their own.

Heilbrun (1999) suggests a different reason as to why many women may not question traditional structures--to avoid the state of "liminality" (p. 3).

> *To be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another. But the most salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing. (p. 3)*

In order to avoid living with the "intensity and suspense" (p. 90) of the state of

liminality, some of the women in this study may have been content to follow the traditional route for women in our society.

Another reason that the women questioned some societal expectations and not others may be connected to what role identities were prominent in their "identity hierarchy" at any particular time (McCall & Simmons, 1978, quoted in McMahon, 1995, p. 19). The prominence of the role identity depends on the "commitment to or personal investment in that identity, the degree of self and social support for the identity and the rewards associated with it" (McCall & Simmons, quoted in McMahon, 1995, p. 19). The women alluded to this when they talked about being a certain age and feeling that age was the right time to be doing a particular thing. For example, when Carol put her desire for an enjoyable job in a recreational community before other commitments such as university she said, "That was my fun time" (p. 8). At the time I interviewed her she was almost 40 and had decided that she had to give up the idea of having more children and be content with being a responsible parent to her now teenaged daughter. When Eve turned 40, the same year that her marriage ended, she decided, "I wanted to do something significant. I wasn't just going to turn 40 and have it happen, you know" (p. 6). Her identities as teacher, wife, and mother were no longer enough for her. So she entered a triathlon for the first time in her life even though she was afraid she would be unable to complete it. But she did finish and she remembered

> *I had such a tremendous sense that this was not life being over at 40. This was, 'Let's go for it!' Life begins all over again , in a sense. (p. 7)*

A change in identity hierarchy may also explain why some of the women decided to return to school after their children were no longer infants needing constant care and attention--they were able to give more prominence to identities other than that of mother (cf. Young, 1992, "Late Bloomers").

The hierarchy of identities may explain some of the many decisions I've made during my life. Following my husband from place to place reflected the importance to me, at the time, of being a "good" wife, a value that had been instilled in me by my mother. I certainly wanted to be a good mother so compromised many of my wants, such

as teaching in foreign countries, in order for me to take responsibility for the care of my children. And, for much of my life, being a "good" teacher was near or at the top of my hierarchy of identities. As a teacher, I often spent ten hours a day at school and also worked on weekends and in the evenings. Teaching was far more than a job to me. It was who I was. However, after more than 25 years, my emphasis on myself as a teacher, mother, and wife began to change. By returning to university, being a student became at the top of my hierarchy of identities. Like Eve, I am not certain what will be in my future or what role will top my identity hierarchy.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine specific female educators' constructions of individual choice and decision-making regarding their education, family life, and career. Through the analysis of individual interviews with nine women, aged 28 to 52, seven themes emerged. These were 1) Higher Education and Professional Preparation, 2) Teaching Careers, 3) Personal Professionalism, 4) Marriage, 5) Children, 6) Influence of Family of Origin, and 7) Identity and Agency. The information assembled under these themes revealed that the choices these female educators faced and the decisions they often struggled with were not only individual concerns, they were shared by other participants. In addition, the decisions made in one area of their lives often affected the choices they felt they could make in other areas.

Societal influences, including pressures from family and friends, affected all the decisions made by the women to a certain degree. Most went to university because it was part of their normal biography, expected by their families and themselves. Only one of the women chose higher education in spite of her family background. For some of the women, family example or encouragement also directed them into the career of teaching. They had been told they would make good teachers or had a family tradition of female teachers which they were expected to follow. Marriage and having children were decisions that almost all of the women seemed to have made when they were still children and influenced by societal norms. They spoke of marriage being part of their life-plan and

of always knowing they would have children. In addition, some of the women believed that it was necessary to be married in order to escape being selfish and eccentric. Their families of origin encouraged them to have children and served as models of how to raise them. Although most women expected to have at least two children, for two of the women deciding to have the second child was a much bigger decision than having the first. This was because they now realized the responsibility they were taking on and the effects another child would have on other parts of their lives. I was surprised at the extent to which the women in this study were influenced by their families of origin. However, upon further examination, I noted that it was the three women aged 38 and 39, with children, who talked the most about the continued influence of family. These women were concerned with continuity between generations and looked to their families as guides for bringing up their own children. Perhaps having children revealed the importance of their own backgrounds and family members.

Societal age markers seemed to affect many of the women's thoughts about when they should make certain decisions. The idea of the "biological clock," a cultural expectation regarding the age when women are getting too old to have children, affected at least five of the women's decisions about when to begin their families. Being 40, sometimes considered "over the hill," influenced Eve to enter a triathlon, and caused Carol to question her life goals.

Children and, to a lesser extent, partners, exerted a large influence on most of these women's lives. The women with children stated that having a child made the biggest difference in their lives to how they regarded themselves, how they saw their choices, and how they made decisions. To these participants, becoming a mother signalled the end of their irresponsible, fun-loving days and the beginning of their adult days of responsibility and relative selflessness. They credited having children with increasing their moral and ethical growth. Having children created a short- or long-term interruption in the women's careers during which time the women stayed home to care for their families. Some of the women structured their careers around the needs of their children and most women who returned to university waited until their children were in school or almost self-reliant. The

women's partners provided financial and moral support and, in one case, was a motivating factor in the woman's choice of career. Two of the women interrupted their careers in order to move with their partners when they relocated in order to advance their careers. These interruptions presented new opportunities to the women when they reentered teaching.

The socio-historical contexts of their lives also influenced some of the women's choices. Birth control information and contraceptives were not readily available at the time Eve had her first child and had an impact on this decision. Jeanne felt that she had little choice but to marry her partner because, at the time, common-law unions were not accorded the same rights as legally married couples. And Marianne felt that, in the uncertain teaching market of the 1990s, she had to wait until she had financial and job security before she got married.

However, there was also evidence that women of all ages did not necessarily accept societal restrictions. Some women kept their natal names to show their independence. One older woman purposefully set her goals outside societal expectations for a woman of her age. One of the younger women decided she would have children whether or not she was married. The women who decided to become administrators sought to change the hierarchial, patriarchal structure of schools. These women challenged some societal boundaries for acceptable female behaviour. And they were purposeful in their challenges. They were attempting to change the way society envisioned themselves, personally, and women, in general.

The women in this study also incorporated their beliefs about their personal identity into their roles as educators. All of the women looked upon themselves as caring individuals who wanted to "help people." At home, they demonstrated their moral beliefs by loving and caring for partners and children, sometimes putting the needs of these others before their own. At work, they endeavoured to make schools better places for students, parents, and other teachers. They envisioned schools as places where teachers could work in a cooperative manner, where the needs of students would come first, where parents would be encouraged to take part in their children's formal education, and where the

teaching profession would be respected and valued. Their personal and professional selves were connected through their ethics of care and concern for themselves and others.

CHAPTER THREE: CONCLUDING COMMENTS

"Life choices come not merely from some abstract principle of what should happen, but from an assessment of the way the world works, what opportunities are open, what paths are possible." (Gaskell, 1992, p. 90)

This final section includes additional reflections and a discussion of the implications of the findings, recommendations for institutions of adult and higher education, and suggestions for further study.

Reflections

The women in this study appear to follow the developmental period theory of Levinson's (1996) life stages work although their specific activities at different ages were not always the same as what he suggests. These activities may, instead, be more related to socio-culture experiences such as level of schooling, career choice, and number and ages of children (see McMahon, 1995; Lowenthal, 1975). For example, most women in this study married at the end of the "entry life structure for early adulthood" (Levinson, 1996, p. 18), at age 28, instead of at age 22, the beginning of the entry life structure and the age at which the women in Levinson's study married. However, a transition period at around age 30 appears to hold for most of these women as they changed their single life style and identity for a married one and began having children. The mid-life transition and the age 50 transition also appear to be applicable for the women I interviewed. Carol, Roberta, and Elaine were all rethinking their careers and wondering where their lives would take them. They were experiencing the need to combine career and family to a more equal degree. Eve, Lesley, and Jeanne were also rethinking their priorities and, now that their children were adults, Eve and Lesley were thinking more of personal and career goals than of family concerns (see Grant, 1989; Lowenthal, 1975; Young, 1992). It was intriguing that Carol, when talking about turning 40, said,

> I really felt this year, too, all of a sudden, my life . . . I realized that I wasn't in control. . . . And it changed SO many things. (p. 25)

This mirroring of the awareness that Hollis says signals the entry into the second adulthood identity left Carol feeling vulnerable. At the same, it hinted at a change in the way she started to look at herself.

Research on women's career development indicates that women often "down-scale" or "compromise" their career aspirations to accommodate motherhood (Fitzgerald, et al, 1995, pp. 72, 87). Most of the women in this study expected to be mothers and homemakers and did not make their career a priority until after their children were in school (Young, 1992). At least one participant chose to teach adults in order to satisfy her desire to be with her children. As the women's personal lives changed, they altered their expectations regarding their career. The older women spent more time at school and took on administrative responsibilities (cf. Young, 1992, "Late Bloomers"). Self-efficacy, in addition to the lessening child-care required of them, may have been a factor in these women's changed career status (Fitzgerald, 1995; Young, 1992). Until they had taught a number of years, they may not have developed the belief that they were able to do administrative work and effect change in their schools. As these women rethought their career goals, they returned to the university to increase their education and prepare themselves for the future. Rather than the "empty nest syndrome" that seemingly affected women in the past, the older women in this study relished this time as an opportunity to take their lives in a different direction.

I had hoped to find that young women today were less influenced by societal pressures than women who had faced the choices of career, marriage, and family 25 years ago. However, this study did not show that. Marriage and children still topped the list of expectations these women had for themselves and career, although important for the financial security and the challenge it brought, was often thought of in terms of how it would work around family needs. The socializing pressure to continue with traditional "women's work" was very evident with many of these women regardless of their ages.

Because the women I interviewed had many things in common, I recognize the lack of transferability of my findings. However, to me, the differences between the women were more significant than their similarities. The diversity of their individual

attitudes toward their choices and decision-making confirmed my belief in the futility of trying to fit these participants into a single category of white, middle-class, heterosexual women. They remain individuals.

Implications for Adult and Higher Education

Why were all of these female teachers undecided about their future careers? Marriage and children were anticipated but careers were not. As Juliette said, "You always think that there'll be another income and that yours will just be supplementary to whatever it is that you're doing" (p. 26). And, the women who looked to school guidance counsellors for help in choosing a career, were disappointed. It is possible that girls and young women are still not being encouraged to see a career choice as an important life-decision, essential for financial and emotional independence. Statistics including marriage and divorce rates, the numbers of female single-parent families living in poverty, and the probability of older women living alone are either not being explained to girls and women, or are not believed. Any career or life-planning education these women had received had been ineffective. Perhaps these women were influenced more by the more traditional beliefs of their male relatives and colleagues who continued to value more conventional gender roles. Colleges and universities may need to increase their role in educating both female and male students as to the changing nature of careers in the lives of all people.

Is teaching being marketed as a viable career choice? The women in this study "chose" the Faculty of Education almost by default. They did not know what else to do and were encouraged by others to think of teaching as something at which they could be successful. Many mentioned that they were "good with children." Marianne entered Education in order to have a job at the end of her four years of university. Elaine enjoyed the flexibility teaching allowed so that she could be with her children. Is there more to teaching than the reasons these women gave? Because the women all went through the public education system, they felt they knew what was involved with being a teacher. Perhaps teaching seemed like a non-threatening field for them to enter. I have noticed that Career Fairs held in high schools and junior highs over the last decade have begun to

emphasize non-traditional careers for women. For girls who think they may want to be teachers, there were no speakers explaining what personal and professional obligations teaching involves or what options or career developments were available for teachers. Spencer (1986) suggests that, although women have traditionally been the largest reserve of potential teachers, today the best and brightest female high school graduates may choose careers that pay more, have more prestige, and are more challenging. If we want excellent, innovative educators, teaching must attract the most able of young people.

Marriage and children are a major part of women's lives. In this study, women expected to be married at some time in their lives and most had or hoped to have children. They also expected to work outside their homes. Because the women's career goals changed depending on the expectations and needs of their husbands and children, women felt the need or desire to increase their education and expected to be continuing their education throughout their lives. Two of the youngest women were enrolled in university programs at the time I interviewed them, one 39-year-old woman was completing a Masters degree, and all three older women were working toward a Doctoral degree either full- or part-time. The remaining women expected to return to the university when finances and/or family responsibilities permitted. Given the changing nature of the workplace, the increased reliance upon technology, and the rapidly growing obsolescence of our knowledge base, increased education and training are almost essential for older women, especially those rejoining the workforce after a number of years. There is also evidence to support the belief that women with higher levels of education remain in the paid workforce well beyond the age of 50 (Mott, 1998). Are universities and other institutions of higher education doing enough to encourage and support mature female students? When I discussed this question with six mature undergraduate women (Brooks 1998) the answer was no. Multiple role women, especially, felt a great deal of stress in trying to manage the physical, emotional, and time demands of being students, mothers, and wives (cf. Young, 1992, "competing urgencies"). Because they blamed themselves for lack of organization or lack of intelligence, they were often tempted to give up their struggle to improve their education (see Home, 1998). Single mothers found early

morning and late afternoon scheduling of compulsory classes left them in a scramble to find suitable child care. Sexism and ageism combined to make some women feel isolated and devalued. Orientation programs and support groups for mature students were unavailable or of limited value. Women who had been out of school for a number of years felt unable to cope with the impersonal, competitive atmosphere in many of their classes. Grade point averages and programs from their early university years were used to set current programs, and non-university experience was discounted. While recognizing that universities and other formal institutions of education are already in the position of turning away many potential students, most women felt that the university could be doing far more to attract and retain older women in university programs.

Recommendations

Universities and other educational institutions and organizations that hope to attract adult learners could do much to make continuing education more learner-friendly for women. The following recommendations would make a big difference to lessening the frustration and stress experienced by many mature female students.

- Provide adequate child-care at reasonable and subsidized rates so that women, regardless of their marital or economic status, will be able to concentrate on their studies instead of worrying about their children.
- Provide help with planning and time management, ongoing peer support, and financial and administrative services at nontraditional times in order that women who are juggling the roles of mother and student can find assistance when they need it (Home, 1998).
- Provide classes on goal-setting skills, problem-solving strategies, assertiveness training, communication skills, financial planning, and stress management for some reentry women (Mott, 1998).
- Provide some orientation sessions led by mature female multiple-role students in order to help beginning students develop realistic expectations and assist them in foreseeing and overcoming problems.

- Encourage the provision for special services and financial aid schemes that may be needed to help low income and minority group women and single parents succeed (Horne, 1998).
- Employ career counsellors who emphasize the importance of career choices to women's financial and emotional independence and who encourage women in their endeavours instead of reverting to sexist and ageist stereotypes of "women's work."
- Provide experiential forms of learning including modelling, apprenticeships, and team projects as these may be the most effective ways for many women to learn due to their desire to feel connected to others and their belief in collaborative rather than competitive ways of interacting (Mott, 1998).
- Provide decision-making courses which would encourage women to think about choice and decision-making in relation to their own lives. These courses could be combined with information on gender socialization and how it affects and has affected the women's personal and work lives (Bierema, 1998).
- Enable the transferability of courses and programs and the completion of courses by distance education so that women who relocate due to their husband's career shifts will be able to continue their education.
- Acknowledge women's past career and home experience when they reenter educational institutions in middle age and take into account their seriousness of intent. For women who know what they want, provide more self-directed graduate programs which could be tailored to fit their needs.
- Recognize the need to make educational institutions better places for women by paying more attention to issues such as safety, security, and freedom from sexual harassment; providing support for mothers whether as students, faculty, or staff; increasing female professors and instructors in areas where women are marginally represented; supporting feminist scholarship; encouraging more women to enter administrative positions; and taking active measures to end homophobia and lesbophobia (Overall, 1998, p. 59).

In the Faculty of Education, specifically, educators could help women and men understand the roles of women in the history and development of teaching, the need to examine women's roles as teachers in relation to the roles of other women in the workforce, the multi-layered roles of female teachers as working wives and mothers, and the need for women to develop ways of realistically coping with the complexities of their roles as teachers and as women (Spencer, 1987, p. 51). These suggestions would help women recognize the connections between the public world of teaching and their personal lives as wives and mothers. More work also needs to be done in undergraduate education courses on the effects of gender-stereotypes and socialization on how students learn and choose careers. Teachers who uncritically accept stereotypes will most likely pass these beliefs along to their students. In my graduate classes where these issues are discussed, many experienced teachers said they had never heard this information before we talked about it in class. Students need to become critically aware of these issues before they become teachers.

Suggestions For Further Study

Three of the women mentioned, at the close of the interview, that they hoped they had been of some help because they felt their lives were not interesting. I regret not asking them more about this comment and think it would be an excellent research topic. Although I suggested that this may have had something to do with the women having always thought of themselves as wives and mothers and not engaging in the kinds of activities thought to be "exciting" in our society (for example, sky-diving or mountain-climbing), this is conjecture on my part and may not be an indication of what the women thought at all.

I am interested in doing a similar study with groups of women who are in different professions or occupations. For example, would female lawyers, female entrepreneurs, or female construction workers experience the same influences of family and friends that these female teachers did? Would they have the same attitudes toward higher education and the intertwining of family and career?

Women's career development literature suggests that, by examining women's career paths, we can also learn more about those of men (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). Perhaps research which included in-depth questions about family and peer influences on choices and decision-making would reveal more about the nature of male educators' career development over the past 25 years.

Although there is a large body of literature detailing the effects of family on the socialization of women, the participants of this study and some of the career development literature both pointed to the influence of mothers, specifically (see, for example, Fitzgerald et al., 1995). It would be interesting to understand the ways in which mothers of female teachers influenced their daughters in this career choice and if their influence had any effect on the grade level the women taught or their desire to become administrators.

While completing this research and talking about the topic of women's choices I discovered that women of all ages have a keen interest in knowing more about their lives. Most of the women with whom I discussed this research asked themselves the questions I had asked the participants and marvelled at the increase is knowledge about themselves that the answers revealed. I believe that continued research into issues that directly affect diverse groups of women will assist many women in discovering the roots of inequalities and help them overcome obstacles to reaching success in their life goals.

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APPENDIX A
LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Date_____

Dear _____,

I am currently a Master's student at the University of Alberta in Educational Policy Studies in the area of Adult and Higher Education. I am especially interested in how women view the role of education in their lives and how educational programs, both in institutions of higher learning such as colleges and universities and in the community, are made available to women. My present research project is entitled, "Genuine Choices?: Women and Decision-Making." In this study I will examine how female educators have made choices during their lives concerning work, education, and family. This will be accomplished by interviewing eight female educators in order to determine what factors have had an influence on their decision-making processes. I will also interview one male educator in order to contrast his experience with those of the women.

As we discussed earlier, I will be seeking your consent to be a part of this study and to tape-record our interview conversations. I am planning a single one to two-hour interview with possible follow-up for clarification, if needed. Before I use information from the interview, I will make the transcripts and/or the summary information available to you for review and feedback.

In keeping with the ethical guidelines of the University of Alberta, I will ensure confidentiality by concealing your identity and any distinguishing elements in your life, personally conducting the interviews and transcribing the tapes, and by erasing the tapes when I have completed the study. The researcher will not use deception of any kind.

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this study. I am hoping that it will shed light on the influences that women experience and take into consideration when they make choices in their lives. The data may also support or question previous research on women's decision-making and life stages. In addition, this research may inform school districts and teachers' associations as well as institutions of higher education as to the concerns and needs of women who work for them or use their services. The information obtained may be used in articles or presentations intended to report on or further this research.

I look forward to meeting with you. If you have questions regarding this research and wish to contact me, I may be reached by phone at 437-1821 (home), or by e-mail at mbrooks@ualberta.ca. You may also discuss questions or concerns with my supervisor, Dr. Beth Young. She may be reached at 492-7617 or beth.young@ualberta.ca.

Sincerely,
Mary M. Brooks

APPENDIX B
CONSENT FORM

Research Title: Genuine Choices?: Women and Decision-Making
Researcher: Mary M. Brooks

I understand and agree to participate in this research project which examines how female educators make life choices.

I understand that my name will remain anonymous and that the information I disclose will be confidential and used in a way that protects my identity. The researcher has assured me that deception, in any form, will not be used.

I understand that, if I want, I may review a copy of the transcript of my taped interview and/or summary information from the interviews.

I agree that Mary Brooks may tape her interview(s) with me and understand that she will transcribe the tapes herself and erase them at the completion of this research project.

I realize that I may refuse to answer any questions or disclose specific information and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any time without consequences.

_____ _____
(Signature of Participant) (Date)

_____
(Signature of Researcher)

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What would you say are five life-changing decisions you've made?
   - prompts: having children, getting married, going to university, leaving home

2. For each of the life-changing decisions (see answers to #1), what were the greatest influences on your decision-making? (How do you make choices?)
   - prompts: parents, friends, media, partner, children, money or lack of money, job

3. Do you see any patterns in how you make decisions about choices?

Some examples of how I would encourage expanded answers:

a. How did you decide to go to University and take education? What people, events, circumstances helped you make this choice? Were there people or events that interfered with this decision or which made it more difficult to decide?

b. When and at what age did you get married? Why did you get married at that time? What people, events, circumstances had an influence on your decision?

c. Do you have children? When and why did you choose to start a family? Were there any events, people, or circumstances which encouraged or discouraged this decision? Do you plan to have more children? Why or why not? What factors will influence this decision?

d. Do you plan to get married/have children/go back to school/change your career, etc. in the future? How will you know when the time is right for these decisions?